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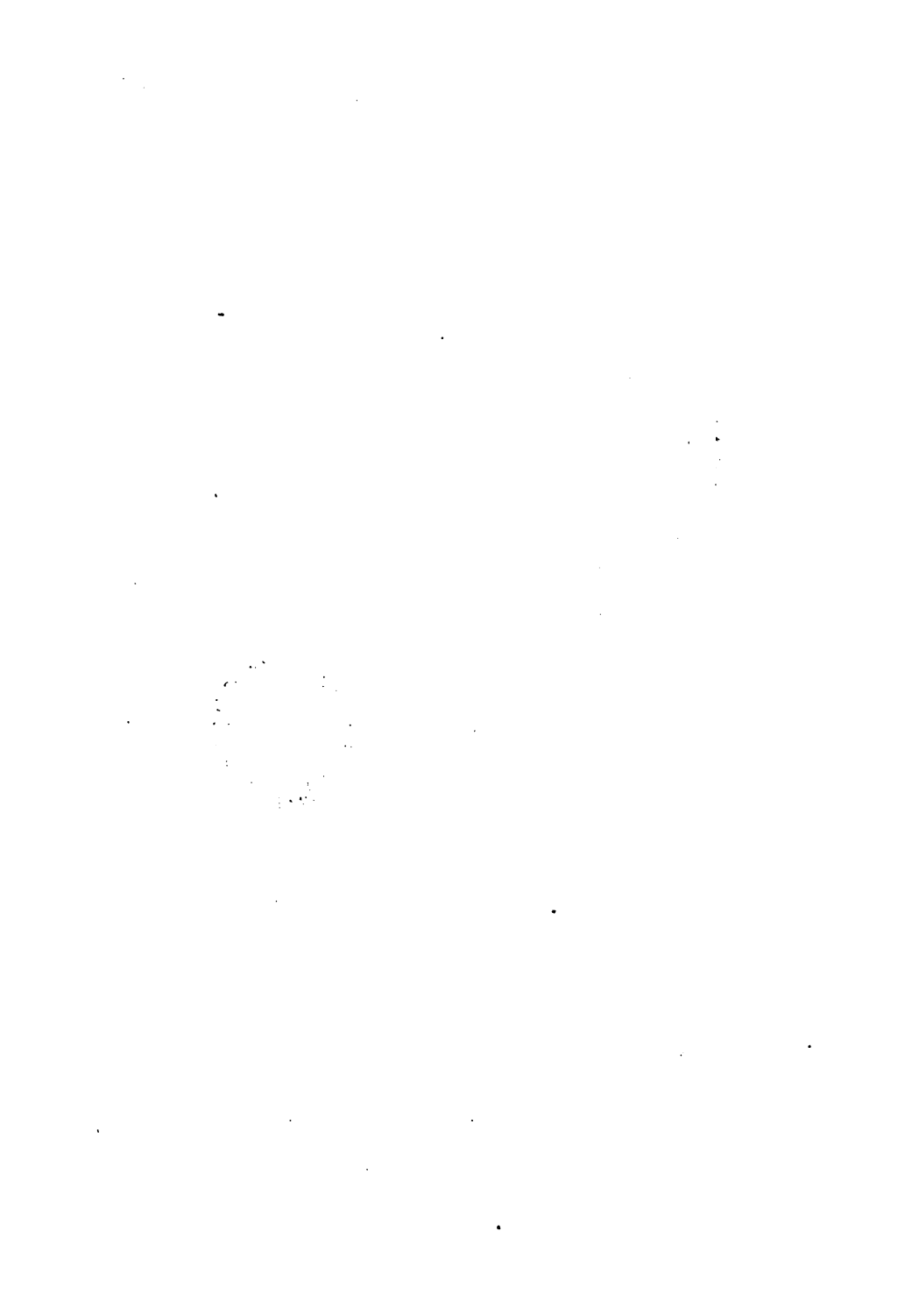
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THE DAYS OF HIS VANITY.

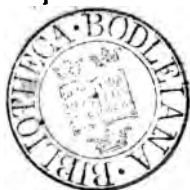
A Passage in the Life of a Young Man.

BY
SYDNEY GRUNDY.

"The days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow."—ECCLESIASTES.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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THE DAYS OF HIS VANITY.

BOOK THE SECOND—*continued.*

CHAPTER III.

HARRY BONAMY.

"As the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool."—*Ecclesiastes.*

THERE are reasons for most things—except ordinary people's opinions ; and it was not very strange Miss Edith Grey should not have given expression to astonishment at hearing from the mouth of Mr. Bonamy, some chapters back, the fact that his son Harry would be home from college before

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very long. The truth was, that Miss Edith was aware of the approach of that event, before she learnt it from the father's lips. For she and Harry corresponded.

Edith was a naughty girl, and in her younger days had got herself into all sorts of trouble with her schoolmistress, in consequence of an innate and irrepressible affinity for youthful persons of the other gender. If, when the boarding-school were walking out in two-and-twos, they had the misfortune to meet the gentlemen of Mr. Birch's classical and commercial academy, engaged in the same exercise, and something very like an understanding was observed by the attendant teacher to exist between the two front rows, it was a moral certainty that Edith was the culprit. And the wicked habits which she had contracted then, she had not even yet relinquished.

What it was that attracted her to Harry Bonamy, it would be difficult to determine on any principle of corresponding tastes; for Edith was an intellectual girl, a little given to poetry, and Harry had no gifts in that direction. But there was about him something that attracted everybody to him. His bright face, and clear blue eyes, and curly hair, his invariable good humour, and perhaps his wild ways also, took the hearts of all the women, and a large proportion of the men; and pranks and escapades, which in a youth of better character would have been looked upon as positive disgraces, were in him regarded as imprudences, which made him interesting. If a man has curly hair and laughing eyes, he will never be regarded as a villain, whatever he may do: for there is nothing like appearances.

He and Edith had been sort of lovers

ever since they were old enough to make eyes at one another ; and that, at any rate in Edith's case, was at a very early age. She had made eyes at Ernest, too, and at a score of other boys ; but they were only used as objects to rehearse upon, to keep her hand in, and by way of pastime. Ernest was all very well when Harry wasn't there ; but the moment Harry made his appearance, Ernest fell into the second place, which was to him no place at all. Perhaps it need not have been so, if he had condescended to compete with his more favoured rival ; for it is energy and enterprise that are successful, just as much in love-making as in anything else ; but Ernest had deep down within him an ungovernable pride, which would not let him enter in the list with any one. If some one else was the preferred one, let him be preferred—at any

cost of silent mortification and midnight agonies. Thus Harry had it all his own way, and had taken full advantage of his opportunities.

Some men can beg and pray for love : they can endeavour to extort it out of pity. They can even descend to exact it, by insisting on the deposition of their rival, when they get the power ; as if such love as can be got by means like these were worth the having. Ernest was not one of these, and scorned to avail himself of the most ordinary advantages. I think he must have wanted Edith to go down upon her knees to him, and lay herself beneath his feet, without being asked. But Edith didn't, and what woman would ? The wooing is worth far more than the winning, to a woman.

This same Harry, being a harum-scarum lad, who got into all sorts of mischief, and

was both a trouble and a serious difficulty to his father, was of course regarded by that father as the only Harry in the world—the boy of boys—the son of sons. He would have done anything for him, and thought himself well repaid by a dig in the ribs, and the appellation of a “rum old buffer.” When Harry got the writing prize at Mr. Birch’s school—the writing was the lowest prize, and all the boys got prizes: it was part of Mr. Birch’s system—he had bought him a gold watch and chain, and overwhelmed him with attentions. And when Harry told him he stood fifth in the first Latin class, the old man thought he had indeed a son; for Harry didn’t tell him there were only five boys in the class.

And now that Harry was grown up into a fine young man, of dashing presence, and most free and easy manners, the two, ex-

cepting for the difference of age, were more like brothers than like son and father.

A few antiquated persons, who had better get out of the way as quickly as possible, regret the good old times when sons addressed their fathers in a deferential, ceremonious way; and many fathers still maintain the attitude of pedagogues before their sons, and think that they are faithfully discharging their parental duties. But which sight is pleasanter? the son who is precise and deferential to his father, and the father who maintains a scrupulous parental dignity before the son; or the son who treats his father like an elder brother, and the father who is just as natural and unrestrained before the son as with his intimates? and which of the two fathers is the happier? which obtains the greater pleasure out of the relationship? We may deny ourselves,



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For he was sitting upstairs in his bedroom, all alone—a curious freak for one so genial and jolly ; but Mr. Grey *was* curious, and had his eccentricities. Jovial as he was, he was at times the subject of profound depression ; and when once the melancholy fit was on him, it was useless to attempt to dissipate it. It invariably ran its course. Whether Mr. Grey's heart—which the doctor had once told him was his weak point, although anybody but a doctor would have thought it was his strong one—had anything to do with these attacks, I cannot say ; but they recurred with periodic certainty.

And nothing in the world—not even his daughters—could rouse him out of them. No event that happened, no visitor who called, appeared to have the slightest interest for him at those times. As for Mrs.

Grey, he positively declined to let her sit in the same room with him ; and whether it was the sense of this indignity, or whether it was that Mrs. Grey considered herself entitled to a monopoly of indisposition, she was always peevish upon these occasions. But neither her resentment, nor anything else, made the slightest difference to Mr. Grey. He sat upstairs alone, until the fit had passed off—though it sometimes lasted for a day or two—and Mr. Bonamy was the only person whom he would permit to see him.

Mr. Bonamy and Harry walked in, arm-in-arm, both radiant ; and the young ladies rose to welcome them.

“ Well, girls,” cried Mr. Bonamy, producing Harry, as if he were a sort of present, “ here he is !”

“ Yes, girls,” echoed Harry, “ here I am !”

And the first thing that Master Harry did, was to kiss both of them.

Now this, in anybody else of his age, would have been a gross impertinence, which would have been resented on the spot—though no one else in all Cornfield, of such an age, would have been impudent enough to do it. But it was Harry Bonamy; and so his father roared, as if it was the best of jokes, and the young ladies only tittered, and submitted.

Even Mrs. Grey seemed pleased to see the youth; for no one, in the shape of woman, appeared able to withstand him; and half rose to greet him when he came to her. He didn't kiss Mrs. Grey; but it would have been forgiven, if he had done.

“And how is Mrs. Grey to-night?” asked Mr. Bonamy; for there was no help for it. He was bound to listen to the catalogue of

evil. Mr. Grey was not at hand to stop the melancholy cataract.

Meanwhile, Master Harry got upon the best of terms with the young ladies ; and in half a minute, had completely bridged the interval of absence—which would have taken anybody else an hour or two. Already, he had got the wool into a hopeless tangle, and spoilt half a day of Edith's fancy-work, by taking it in hand himself, and trying to continue it.

"*I'll* show you how to do it," he had said. "You put that there, and that in there, and this across the other—then, you give a pull, and the whole business comes undone." And so it did.

A not particularly brilliant joke ; but it was Harry Bonamy's—and so the two girls laughed as if it was the funniest thing they'd ever seen.

“And how’s the husband?” inquired Mr. Bonamy, taking advantage of a short hiatus in the catalogue of Mrs. Grey’s complaints, to change the subject. “Not got home yet? Some committee meeting, I suppose.”

“No,” answered Hester, coming to his aid. “Papa’s upstairs.”

“Oh, oh!” said Mr. Bonamy. “The megrims.”

“Mr. Grey is not particularly well—or thinks he’s not,” explained the wife, with emphasis upon the “thinks”—as if it was a foible of Mr. Grey’s, which people who had no such fancies were obliged to humour.

“Too many dinner-parties, I suppose,” said Harry. “Indigestion. I know what it is.”

“I don’t think that you do,” sighed Mrs. Grey, “or you wouldn’t speak of it in

that light way. The agonies I suffer from it."

Harry winked at the young ladies.

"Though I never mention them," continued Mrs. Grey.

And Harry winked again : and the young ladies, who had had as much as they could do to keep their countenances on the first occasion, now laughed out. For Harry's winks were so amusing.

"I must have a look at him," said Mr. Bonamy.

"I don't know that he'll see you," remarked Mrs. Grey, with some asperity.
"He won't see me."

Mr. Bonamy thought he could quite understand that ; but contented himself with the observation, "Well, we'll ask him."

So, Hester went to see, and brought down word that Mr. Bonamy might go up-

stairs. And much to Mrs. Grey's dissatisfaction, up he went.

"Well, Grey, what is it?" inquired Mr. Bonamy, in his most cheery tone; but the "Hallo, Bonamy!" which was his usual greeting, was not the response. In fact, there was none.

Mr. Grey was sitting, moodily, in an arm-chair; without a book, a newspaper, or anything; and he was blankly gazing into a cold grate. A bedroom fireplace, with no fire in it, is not a cheerful object, even in the height of summer; and a shiver went through Mr. Bonamy when he regarded it, and thought, "Poor Grey! he's very bad."

"Why, what's the matter?"

"I don't know," said Mr. Grey, quite sulkily: for it is surprising how like children men can be.

"Some business bother?" queried Mr. Bonamy.

"No, business is all right," responded Mr. Grey, as if he didn't care to be cross-questioned; and then, suddenly, as if it struck him he was being a surly bear, he cried, in something like his usual tones, "It does one good to look at you, old fellow! have you such a thing as a cigar about you?"

To be sure he had; and he produced it. Mr. Bonamy would not have been without that fortunate cigar for fifty pounds. And in a minute Mr. Grey was smoking comfortably, and appearing almost like himself. But it was only a flash in the pan; and he relapsed again into his moody humour.

"I've brought Harry with me," chirruped Mr. Bonamy, in hopes of rousing him. For Harry was his trump card al-

ways, and he had reflected somewhat thus : " Grey's very down. The game is almost hopeless. A trump lead may win it. If it doesn't, the game isn't to be saved. So I'll play trumps." And he played Harry.

But Mr. Grey's hand had no trumps in it just then ; and he was unable to return the well-intended lead. In fact, he couldn't follow suit : for all he said was, " So I hear."

But Mr. Bonamy reflected : " I'll go on with trumps. He may be able to bring in a suit, if I can only throw the lead into his hand." So Mr. Bonamy went on with Harry.

" The young rascal ! there's a pretty lot of bills for me to pay. He *has* being going it. I've half a mind to cut up rusty."

" Don't," said Mr. Grey. " You pay them, and say nothing. It's the best plan, if it's the first time."

To tell the truth, it wasn't the first time, nor yet the second ; but Mr. Grey's advice was so agreeable to Mr. Bonamy, that he resolved to act upon it. He cut up rusty ! He couldn't have done it—not to save his life.

“He's an extravagant young dog, that's what he is,” said Mr. Bonamy, with quite an air of pride ; as if it were a glorious privilege to have a son who was an extravagant young dog. And I believe he felt it so. If he had had no bills to pay, I verily believe he would have been quite disappointed, and considered Harry had not done his duty.

But not a word did Mr. Grey vouchsafe, and not another syllable could Mr. Bonamy get out of him. He knew his man, and did not bother him. And so the two sat, for at least an hour, without a word ; till even

Mr. Bonamy got tired of it, and said, "Good-night, old fellow."

"Good-night, Bonamy," said Mr. Grey. "And thank you."

"Yes, Grey's very bad," thought Mr. Bonamy, as he went down the stairs. "He's very bad, indeed. I wonder what these fits are. I suppose they're constitutional."

Meanwhile, Harry had been making himself very much at home; and had delighted the three ladies by all sorts of tricks, and jokes, and liberties; and Mr. Bonamy discovered the two girls at the piano, playing away as energetically as their shrieks of laughter would permit them, to the accompaniment of Harry on an improvised trombone.

"What would Mr. Tempest think of us, if he could see us?" exclaimed Hester.

"Bother Mr. Tempest," said her sister.

So much for our hero.

"Now then, Harry, off we go," cried Mr. Bonamy. "Poor Mrs. Grey has had enough of your tomfoolery."

It was well that nobody else called it such a name.

"I hope you'll come again soon," said Mrs. Grey, as she shook hands with Harry.

"You've quite cheered me up."

"Oh, yes, I'll come to breakfast," said the idol: and he did.

"Good-night, girls," shouted Mr. Bonamy, upon the steps.

"Good-night, dears," shouted Harry, as he followed him.

"Good-night," cried the girls, who had come with them to the door. And as they closed it, Edith took the opportunity of pocketing a little note, which the audacious

Harry had slipped through her fingers when she shook hands with him.

“Which do you like best?” asked Hester of her sister, when the two were taking down their hair, that night, in their joint bedroom; “Harry, or Mr. Tempest?”

“Harry,” replied Edith. “He’s so funny.”

Oh, those funny men!

CHAPTER IV.

DISAPPOINTMENT.

“What profit hath he that hath laboured for the wind?”
Ecclesiastes.

ST. CLEMENT DANES rang merrily this morning, for several days have passed, and Ernest has been working very hard, and at last the comedy is finished. “Oranges and lemons” sounds almost like a marriage jubilation.

Ernest made it up into as neat a parcel as he could : though tender as he was with it, he could not help inflicting a few bends and creases on the precious manuscript :

and posted it to Mr. Cooke without delay. He felt but little doubt of its acceptance. He had doubted very much whether he would be able to write it at all, but having succeeded in doing that, he was perfectly satisfied. He scanned the list of the members of Mr. Cooke's company, as published in the papers, with an anxious interest, and cast the piece in his own mind with great success. The piece which Mr. Cooke was just then playing seemed to be confoundedly likely to run a hundred nights, but that would give the more time for rehearsals. He would not ask very much for its production. Mr. Cooke had been exceedingly considerate, and he should reap the benefit of his uncommon kindness. He should not be charged more than, say, two pounds a night.

It was a little remiss in Mr. Cooke not

to acknowledge the receipt of the MS., but no doubt he was very busy. Perhaps he had decided upon reading it before communicating with the author. Might be, he was reading it at that identical moment. The days lagged terribly. How many times more would Ernest have to go to bed, to get up, to shave himself, to dress himself, to have his breakfast, dinner, tea, before he heard from Mr. Cooke? Would that postman never come?

Oh, that postman, with his double-knock! Is there anything under the sun about which so much hope deferred and sickness of the heart are crystallized as that same knock? You can hear it coming up the street—rat-tat, rat-tat, rat-tat—like a dropping fire of musketry. All the houses in the neighbourhood are getting letters. Then, there is a longer pause than

usual. Though you know it's childish, you can't help just looking out to ascertain the reason for the pause. There is the familiar uniform, with the red piping. If he isn't talking to a nurse-girl—only for a minute, but it seems like ten—and then rat-tat, rat-tat, still nearer and still cheerier every time. Another pause. That number twenty-nine, which gets a letter every delivery, has got to pay a penny extra for an insufficient stamp. He's off again. Rat-tat—he's nearly reached you—rat-tat—he's next door. You rush back from the window that he may not see you absolutely looking out for him, and he comes bustling up, more cheerily than ever—to your next-door neighbour on the other side! And then, rat-tat, rat-tat, all down the street, still fainter, and still drearier every time, until it dies away in dismal distance.

Yours is the only house in all the street at which he has not called.

Ten days passed thus, and Ernest can control himself no longer. He sits down, and writes to Mr. Cooke again—a very polite letter—detailing the circumstances of their previous conversation, and enclosing a stamped directed envelope for the reply. Ten more days passed. The postman went through the old game twelve times a day, and no reply came. Ernest wrote a third time. Third times pay for all. He got an answer.

“DEAR SIR,—My programme is arranged so far ahead that it is useless looking at your comedy. Yours in haste,

“ORLANDO COOKE.”

A theatrical manager never wrote a letter in this world except “in haste.”

And by the next post—for of course the postman, not being wanted now, immediately called—back came the MS. bundled up anyhow—for by some accident it had been opened—draggled, soiled, and torn.

And Ernest's soul boiled over, and I fear it would have gone hard with a play of Mr. Cooke's if one had been produced just then. Instead of which absurd demeanour, had he been a little more experienced, he would have been extremely grateful that he got his MS. back at all. I can assure him, Mr. Cooke took very great credit to himself for sending it, and thought that he had been at a good deal of trouble in the matter.

It was aggravating, certainly, was that "in haste" from a man who was so exceedingly deliberate over his gin-and-water, and who spent so large a portion of his

time in sleep. But it was still more aggravating to take up a copy of a magazine which had just then come out, and to discover in it a contemptuous article upon "Unacted Authors"—and considering that every acted author was unacted once, and every published story-teller once unpublished, the insolence of newspapers and magazines to the unacted and unpublished ones is truly astounding : in which precious article it was flatly stated that it was quite ridiculous for aspirants to pretend that they did not receive from managers all the attention they deserved, "when the ranks of management contained two men of such discernment, enterprise, and courtesy as Benson Baker and Orlando Cooke."

Ernest had tried Cooke. He now tried Baker. He made up the desecrated manu-

script as neatly as he could, and sent a very humble letter with it. It would be tedious to take the reader through the processes: the result will be sufficient. Ernest never saw or heard of it again.

He mourned the loss of his poor comedy with a grief which only an author can imagine. It positively cost him tears, for a writer loves the offspring of his brain with a love something akin to the love with which a mother loves her child, and for the same reason—that it is an actual part of him, a something which has come right out of him, the birth of which has cost him pains and throes. It may be a poor specimen, but it is his, and all the world to him. But still he was not half so indignant with Baker as he was with Cooke, for Cooke had positively set him on to it. He raged against that old impostor, and he

paid a visit to the *Owls* on purpose just to have it out with him.

He was now a full-fledged member of that notable society, and often smoked his pipe there; but he was not very well known, for he seldom spoke to anybody, though he was a greedy listener. He had often seen old Cooke there half asleep, but he had never spoken to him since the day when last we saw him. This foolish diffidence was one of Ernest's faults, and greatly impeded his progress in life; but now, indignation gave him boldness, and he would have tackled anybody.

There was old Cooke, sure enough, in his accustomed seat; and there was old Cooke's gin-and-water, on the table by his side. Asleep, as usual, to all appearance.

Ernest took up his position, near enough to open fire upon him when he woke.

But he awoke so suddenly, that Ernest was quite taken by surprise, and couldn't light his powder quick enough.

Some impulse had seized Cooke to write a letter. He called for paper, pen, and ink. Do what he could, Ernest could not help looking over his shoulder, when he signed it ; and he signed it, just as Ernest had expected—"Yours in haste, Orlando Cooke." And having signed it, he went instantly to sleep again ; and there the letter lay upon the table. Between me and the reader, that letter wasn't posted for a week—and then, only by accident.

There was nothing for it but to wait till Mr. Cooke woke up again : so Ernest listened to the conversation that was going on around him.

There was something very like an altercation going on, but it turned out to be

nothing more than a critical dispute. It was the old trial, Dickens *versus* Thackeray.

"I tell you," said the formidable critic, with the sandy air and undecided features—in a hesitating, nervous way, in striking contrast to the decision of his sentiments—"Dickens was a—a—a humbug."

"Not so much a humbug as an actor," commented the less emphatic Rogers. "An actor who could never wash the paint off, or forget the footlights."

"I say he was a—a—a—humbug, sir," replied the formidable critic—who endeavoured to conceal the natural indecision which his manner indicated, by the greatest emphasis of language.

"I don't think that," replied the other.

"Nor does Sanderson," put in the light young man. "He only says it."

"You—you are totally mistaken, sir,"

retorted Sanderson. "I always—er—er—think before I speak."

"Then, there's the less excuse for what you say," returned the light young man. "I was too charitable."

"Do you allow him to have had a particle of humour, Sanderson?" inquired the grave, bald-headed man.

"Oh, yes—yes—I grant you, he had—er—er—humour. Of a coarse—er—er—bar-parlour sort. But it's his pathos, sir—or—or—or—what you call his pathos—I object to."

"It's a little strained sometimes," replied the man with the bald head.

"It's laid on with a trowel," remarked the light young man.

"It's just theatrical," said Rogers. "Neither more nor less."

"It isn't—isn't genuine," asserted Sanderson.

"Oh yes, it is," replied Rogers. "It doesn't follow that a feeling isn't genuine, because it is expressed dramatically. Does it, Conway?"

Mr. Conway was a sort of playwright, who adapted pieces from the French, and had converted more than one of Dickens' novels into melodramas. An ordinary author writes with pen and ink; but Mr. Conway, with a pair of scissors and a paste-pot.

"What's the good of asking Conway?" exclaimed the light young man. "*He* never expressed anything dramatically."

Mr. Conway did not answer hastily, but gently jingling with his hand a pocketful of sovereigns, smoked his pipe with great complacency; and then drawled—

"Is it sixpence or a shilling for a joke now, Elliott?"

“Do you—you mean—to tell me,” spluttered Sanderson, “that Dickens—er—er—felt all that—that pathos—which he dosed his readers with?”

“I do,” replied the more sagacious Rogers. “I don’t mean to say he felt it in the same way as Thackeray felt his. It is a more superficial sort of pathos—dealing more with the outside of life—starvation, poverty, and the physical oppressions of society, effected through the medium of beadles, constables, and Jacks-in-office generally. He is least successful when he deals with mental miseries, and the deeper tyrannies of nature and society.”

Men find their level even more remarkably in ordinary club-room conversation, than in greater crises; and it was observable, that while nobody thought anything of interrupting Sanderson, it was

very seldom anybody interrupted Rogers ; although Sanderson produced the greater effect in print, where his apparently strong views were not belied by his vacillating manner.

“It is impossible, I think, to judge a man’s real character by anything he writes,” remarked the man with the bald head, “One always finds an author’s character is different to what one had expected from his writings.”

“That’s when you come to grub up family particulars for his biography,” observed the light young man. “I only hope you’ll never write mine.”

“You need be under no apprehension,” returned the biographer. “I only write the lives of men who have distinguished themselves.”

Altogether, the light young man was

coming the worst off, this morning ; but he didn't seem to see it, and stroked his pale moustache with infinite satisfaction.

“ Everything depends on whether you interpret what he writes correctly,” replied Rogers. “ If you read between the lines, and read correctly, I don't think it possible to have a better index of an author's character than what he writes. I had much rather trust his writings than his actions, or even the opinions of those who know him best. All actions are deceptive ; because, firstly, you can never get at the mixed motives which induced them ; and secondly, you cannot tell how far the motives you can get at, represent his general feelings. I don't think a man *can* deceive you upon paper. What a man writes represents him better far than what he does. When a man has done an action which is inconsistent

with his writings, we are apt to think he has been humbugging us, and that the action represents the real man. But it may be, and I believe it is, that by the actions we are taken in, and that the writings are sincere."

"In—in plain English, Rogers," said the formidable critic, "words are—are—more than deeds."

"They often are ; although I didn't say so."

"Then, I'm—I'm—I'll be hanged if I can make out what you mean."

"Don't try," observed the light young man. "Intelligence is not your forte."

"It doesn't follow, because a man's deeds seem to be, or are, irreconcilable with his words, that therefore he's a humbug. The world has got to learn that," added Rogers. "But I didn't say words ; I said writings."

"Well, I—I—I don't like Dickens," persisted Sanderson.

"Now we've got at it," exclaimed the playwright. "Sanderson doesn't like Dickens, therefore Dickens is a humbug. Q. E. D."

"Of course, *you'll* stand up for him," retorted Sanderson, "or where would—would your adaptations be? But let me tell you—if I don't like Dickens, I—I—I abominate your versions of him."

"They draw the public," remarked Conway, fingering the sovereigns, and smoking placidly.

"Thistles draw a donkey," growled the formidable one, as well as his weak, piping, little voice would let him.

"The public *is* an ass," agreed the light young man, remembering a little publication of his own, which had not

repaid expenses; and this proposition being incontestable, the conversation languished.

At this juncture, Mr. Cooke showed signs of waking up. The truth was, he had never been asleep; and if Ernest had only had a little more assurance, he would have attacked him long ago. But it required all Ernest's indignation to attack him even now. It is surprising how those crushing sarcasms, with which we annihilate our enemies in the privacy of our apartments, vanish at the sight of them. But with an enormous effort, Ernest managed to say, "Mr. Cooke, would you oblige me for a minute?"

Mr. Cooke stared at him vacantly; and replied by pulling out a huge gold watch, and gazing at it fixedly; as if to see that not a single moment more than the desi-

derated minute was exacted of his valuable time.

“My name is Tempest.”

Mr. Cooke again stared at him, vacantly.

“Ernest Tempest.”

Mr. Cooke still stared.

“I had the pleasure of being introduced to you, some weeks ago.”

“I dare say.”

“By Mr. Potts,” continued Ernest. But the mention of his friend’s name touched no chord of memory in Mr. Cooke’s mind. It was too evident he had forgotten all about it ; and the temporary consideration Ernest had received, on account of his connection with the *Newsletter*, had, of course, vanished with the remembrance.

Now, if Ernest had been sensible, he would have reminded Mr. Cooke of that

connection, of his criticism upon William Shakespeare's first appearance, and of the fact that Mr. Cooke had actually proposed him as a member of the club. But Ernest was too shy. Instead of this, he said something which instantly awoke all Mr. Cooke's antagonism.

"I sent a comedy to you, a little while ago."

"Humph!" grunted Cooke.

"You told me, when we first were introduced, that you would read one, if I wrote it—and indeed, it was your promise that induced me to attempt it."

"I don't remember anything about it," answered Mr. Cooke, "but if I said I'd read it, why, of course I shall."

"But you've *not* read it," replied Ernest.

"Well, give me time. I say, I shall. I didn't say, I had."

"But you've returned it to me."

"Have I? Well, what more do you want?"

"I should have liked you to have read it—as you promised."

"Well, if I promised, send it me again; and give me time, and I'll just look it over."

"Unfortunately," explained Ernest, "I sent it to Mr. Baker, and he's lost it."

"Well, then, if you've gone and lost your comedy—"

"I didn't lose it."

"But it's lost?"

"Yes."

"Very well, then, if your comedy's lost, I can't read your comedy. Can I?"

"No," assented Ernest, "but—"

"What is it that you want of me?" inquired the manager, with quite an air of injury.

The fact was, Ernest simply wanted to pitch in to him, and to awaken in him some sense of his gross injustice; instead of which, he was only confirming Mr. Cooke in the excellent estimation in which he already held himself, and really couldn't say what he did want. So he stammered, and was silent.

"Look here, young man," exclaimed the virtuous manager, as he got up, and put his hat on; "when you know exactly what you want of me, you speak to me again. It seems to me, you don't know what you want." And Mr. Cooke stalked off, with dignity.

Poor Ernest! this was his first lesson, how injustice often gets the best of justice, in this world, and walks away with an air of virtue.

CHAPTER V.

THE LITTLE WHITE HOUSE.

"The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning."
Ecclesiastes.

THIS experience so disgusted Ernest with his distinguished theatrical and literary acquaintances, that he began to think a little more of his more humble friends. It struck him that he ought to go and see the Vanes. It was now some weeks—in fact, it was a good many weeks—since Agnes had been buried, and they must by this time have got over the first violence of their grief.

But somehow, he felt rather shy of going.

There is something in a great grief, which in the nature of things we cannot feel as poignantly as they, which seems to come between us and our friends. We fear that there may be something in our tone, or look, or manner, which may jar upon them. We are thrown, for the time being, out of sympathy; and in our dread of giving pain to them, we often leave them in a very cruel solitude. A little reflection might satisfy us, that even in its grief humanity is sociable; and that, as soon as the first agonies are over, it is a relief to talk about our sorrows. Yea, in great grief, we are more inclined to make a friend of a stranger, than to make a stranger of a friend.

The Vanes had thus been left in very wretched solitude; for even the few neighbours who were in the habit of calling upon them—and they were not many—seemed

to avoid them just at present: and the doctor was the only visitor they had.

The blinds were up now, and the little white house, looked as it had always looked—but with a difference. There seemed to be a solemn air about it. Ernest wondered whether, if he had not known that anything had happened, he should have observed the alteration. Everything appeared the same, and yet there was a difference. It looked like the corpse of the little white house that used to be.

He rang the bell—a very little ring—and it was answered by the corpse of the old housemaid; but she brightened up a little when she saw him.

“I’m so glad you’ve come, sir,” said the girl. “We’ve been so very lonely.”

And Ernest was immediately very glad he’d come, and felt himself already wel-

comed. It is always a good sign, when the servant who opens the door for you is glad to see you, and braces you up for the ceremony—always a little awful—of entering the room.

Doesn't Thackeray say somewhere—even in those households where one is familiar, one's first entrance is a little crisis? Your friend Jones may be asleep, perhaps, in his arm-chair, with a handkerchief over his head, and may not thank you for the interruption; or Mrs. Jones may, perhaps, be mending some unmentionable article of female underclothing. Worst of all, Mr. and Mrs. Jones may have been having a few words, and both be sitting in an attitude of "who speaks first?"

Yes, it always must be one of the small crises of existence—that first entering a room, and it helps one on wonderfully,

when the servant smiles a welcome at the front door. I detest your well-bred servants, who receive you as if they'd never before set eyes upon you, when they know every hair of your head off by heart; and your ill-bred servants, who look as if they were resenting having had to come up the kitchen-stairs to let you in. We must all of us know houses, where the servants are part and parcel of our friends; houses which wouldn't be the same without the accustomed face to greet us at the door.

Ernest was shown straight into the dining-room—the servant thinking nobody was there. But Mrs. Vane was there.

In the agitated state into which her daughter's death had thrown her, and from which she had not yet recovered—although outwardly she was, as we have seen, collected — Ernest's unexpected presence

seemed to have upset her : for as soon as she had turned from something she was doing when he entered, and he saw her face, it wore an almost startled look. She soon recovered her composure, though, and welcomed him in the old quiet, but impressive way.

Still, there were traces in her countenance of what she had gone through. It was not the old gentle face, and the eyes were not looking back into the past. It was nearly the old face when she was speaking ; but in those traitorous pauses of the conversation, which so frequently betray the mind's pre-occupation or anxiety, it was a different face. A restless, frightened face—a pitiful, despairing face—a drawn, seared face—with eyes for ever wandering about, and almost bloodshot.

It was evident to Ernest, that the calm

composure she had first exhibited was the result of a great effort ; and that the reaction had set in, and that the nerves of the poor lady had been ruthlessly unstrung. Her manner appeared, now and then, almost hysterical.

There was something else, he did not quite know what, that excited his attention. He kept looking up and down the room ; he didn't know for what, or why ; but still he did keep looking up and down. What could it be ?

He asked her many questions about Agnes, and it was painfully plain that the poor mother's heart was broken : and that it was not her daughter's death that had broken it, but her death with the name of another on her lips, and with a smile for another on her cheeks—another, she had only known six months.

Ernest knew not what to say ; and yet he would have given everything he had, to have been able to console that stricken heart. And Mrs. Vane saw this, and saw his inability to carry out his wishes ; for she said, "Don't mind me. I am used to being given up for another. It isn't the first time."

This made matters worse. Ernest was dumbfounded. It was the first allusion she had ever made to her past history. That fact alone was proof enough of her despair.

"Nobody ever loved me—not so well as they loved others," wailed the wretched lady, so unlike herself—so altered from the old reserve.

And even in that crisis of the conversation, so strong is curiosity, that Ernest felt his eyes still wandering about in search he did not know of what. What was it ? It

was something about the room : that was certain. But the furniture was just the same—the cat was curled up on the hearth-rug—everything was just as usual.

“I am all alone,” continued the poor lady. “I was always all alone.”

Matters had got very painful ; when the door opened, and Rosamond walked in, like a relieving angel.

Indeed like an angel. What a change had come over Rosamond ! In those few weeks she had positively grown. And with her hair coiled up around her head, instead of roughly tumbling about her shoulders, and her staid, white face, she did look beautiful indeed. The giggles had all gone now. There was even an expression of pain in her face, and a decision and intelligence which were quite new to it. Ernest, in his heart, fell down and worshipped her.

It was not so much a melancholy as a shocked look, that she wore. No doubt, she had discovered which of her two daughters the sad lady loved the best.

Rosamond appeared to notice something when she came into the room ; and after greeting Ernest, the first thing she did was to open wide the window.

That was it !

There was a faint, familiar smell of something. What it was, he could not even guess.

"How close it is !" said Rosamond.

"It's beautiful outside," said Ernest.

"Don't you think a drive would do your mother good ?"

"She'll only go to one place," answered Rosamond.

"And why not there?" asked Ernest, guessing where it was. "I wish you would

take me. I haven't been, and should so like to go."

"What do you say, mamma?"

"Nay, what do *you* say, Rosamond?" said Mrs. Vane. The two appeared to have changed places, quite.

"I think you'd better," replied Rosamond.

There was a strange mixture of affection and command about the way in which the giggling school-girl of six weeks ago addressed her mother.

In truth, Mrs. Vane was in sore need of some one to direct her, for she seemed to have lost all the little interest she ever had in life.

The things were soon put on, and the three drove out to Brompton, in the summer air.

There—in a quiet corner of that silent

city of the dead—they gathered round a plain white marble tomb, surmounted by a cross, beneath which was engraven, “Agnes Vane,” and these four words—
“She died in youth.”

The sun shone right upon it, and the wind sighed gently through the trees ; and Mrs. Vane grew calm again, and like her old self. Her eyes ceased to wander aimlessly, and rested on the cross ; and her poor broken heart appeared to close together ; and her love for her lost child rushed back in all its fulness, and she felt that it was nature’s fault, and not her daughter’s, that another was preferred to her in those last, awful moments ; and she knelt beside that pure white marble tomb, and, even before Ernest, prayed aloud, that she might be forgiven for her selfishness.

And then they drove back, through the summer air, silent and tranquil.

When they reached the small white house again, Ernest prepared to take his leave ; and Mrs. Vane thanked him, with her eyes full, for his kindness.

Strange to say, he felt quite nervous when he came to say good-bye to Rosamond. He had felt curiously with regard to her, all the time that they had been together—felt as he had never felt before—and positively blushed when once she caught him gazing at her. It was a day of mysteries.

He had avoided her eyes afterwards ; but there was no avoiding them when she advanced to say good-bye to him, and looked him through and through. As their hands touched and parted, there was in those eyes a look so searching, so beseeching, and so curious, it haunted him all day.

As he walked home, he thought of it, and could not understand it. It was a look that seemed to say, have you found out the secret? But to what could such a look refer? He had not found it out.

Pondering these mysteries, and thinking of that sweet sad lady, kneeling by that pure white tomb, he passed a glaring vault; and through its swinging doors—as miserable women walked inside, to drown their sorrows in its wretched consolation—there belched out into the balmy air a sickening stench, which rooted Ernest to the flag on which he stood, as if a rivet had been driven through him.

Now he understood that searching look; and now he recognised that faint, familiar smell.

Brandy.

CHAPTER VI.

POOR HUMANITY.

"I sought in my heart to give myself unto wine."
Ecclesiastes.

I PASS as rapidly as possible over the next few weeks. There are, deep down in silent corners of the best of us, black spots of sin and pitiable weakness, which it is humiliating to explore. Spots which, when we discover them in others, make us shrink from them and loathe them; forgetting, perhaps, that they are also in ourselves, but have not been found out. Spots which we loathe and shrink from even in ourselves.

If every man's and every woman's thoughts and feelings and emotions at all times and in all places were transparent, there is not a human being on the earth who would have anything to do with any other. We should seek companions in the birds of the air and the beasts of the field—forgetting that the only reason *they* are sinless, is because they have no power to be otherwise; and if they had, would be as sinful as ourselves. It is vain to pretend it is our fault that these black spots exist. No man on earth can help them. They are in our nature, and were meant to be; and we can no more change them than the leopard can change his. It is the greatest folly in the world to set up to be higher than our nature; and the effort only ends in the more terrible disaster.

Nature has implanted in us—for no pos-

sible good purpose discernible by man—a self within a self; a self that we abominate and loathe, and would burn out of us with red-hot irons if we could; but which we cannot. It is part of us and must remain so. Telling us that man, with all his noble qualities and glorious aspirations, is not after all the crown of nature's work, but a transition. Telling us—as we are told, indeed, by many of the coarse necessities of human nature—that we are hybrid beings, but a little lower than the angels, but a little higher than the brutes: a link in nature's never-ending chain, connecting something that is more ignoble in the past with something nobler which is yet to come. Oh, if that day of universal judgment, about which some dream, when all our hearts should be exposed stark naked to the eye, should ever come to pass—surely the most

terrible conception that was ever born of the imagination of man—how father, mother, brother, sister, would revolt from mother, father, sister, brother! And oh, what a dreadful downfall would the Pharisees, and the Christians, and the highly respectable people generally, come, upon that fearful day! Oh, how much spotless linen would want washing, and how many broad phylacteries would want refurbishing!

Let no man dare to cast a stone at Mrs. Vane. Let no man dare to sneer at her, or to despise her. There are some who spend their lives by unintelligent firesides without a grief, to speak of, to disturb their brainless peace; and there are others upon whose devoted heads God, nature, fortune—call it what you will—hurls trouble upon trouble, woe on top of woe; such troubles and such woes as shake the very soul. Don't talk of

justice ; don't talk of people getting their deserts ; don't talk of mortals making their own fates : it is the babbling of a fool. And neither man nor woman can withstand these troubles, if they fall. The soul of man can no more stand against the moral shocks of this dread nature, than his body can against her physical omnipotence. One may be able to resist longer than another, but a man can no more stand against temptation than against Niagara. If he is not overwhelmed, it is not that he was too strong, but that temptation was not strong enough. By all means, let us make the best resistance that we can ; but if we stand, let us remember that it is by nature's partiality, and not by our own strength. She may not hurl her fiercest thunderbolt upon us ; if she did, we should succumb : for whom the bolt strikes, falls.

This ought to teach us charity, if we are capable of learning it. One is stronger than another, and all of us might be stronger than we are ; but we are all helpless before nature—brothers and sisters in our impotence. There are miseries in life which no man can endure ; but they act differently on different dispositions. They drive one to one thing and another to another ; some to drink, and some to piety. Perhaps, to an all-seeing eye, such crimes as suicide itself might seem not greater weaknesses than cynicism and misanthropy.

Poor Mrs. Vane had been dealt out a misery which, had it been administered by any other hand than God's, we should have stigmatised a cowardly blow ; for it had struck her in the one whole corner of a much-bruised heart, and snatched away the single happiness that made endurable a

wretched life. It was not nature's fault her life had been so wretched ; it was man's—man's prejudices and man's laws ; but this last blow came straight from nature's hand. And she had prayed, and prayed, and prayed—good God, how she had prayed ! oh, it is pitiful to think of her—beseeching on her knees, by night and day, that summer heaven which had no eyes to see or ears to hear her, and which smiled upon her mockingly.

The blow had struck her through her mother's love.

Now, the essential natural love is that which binds together child and parent. Other loves may be more passionate, but they are accidental. The relationship of husband and wife is not, and cannot in the nature of things be so close, as that of child and parent. Humiliating as it sounds, it is the merest accident whom we fall in love

with. Certain qualities may attract us to a certain person out of the circle of our acquaintance, but the whole circle is a chance. And it is almost a moral certainty that, if we hadn't met our wife, we should have married some one else ; whom, as things happen, we may never meet at all. Yes, ladies, it is an unpleasant truth ; but truth has a confirmed habit of being unpleasant.

Of course it often—nay, it almost always happens—that the accidental love is stronger than the essential ; for that, too, is human nature ; and it is the ordinance of nature also, that the love of the child for the parent shall not, speaking generally, equal in intensity the love of the parent for the child. Apart altogether from the evil wrought by man and human laws, these natural laws must always bring about much misery. Were society to reach the nearest possible

approximation to perfection—were vice and sin eradicated altogether—men would still be miserable ; for humanity is enveloped in a cloud of misery, which arises from the operation of the laws of nature. And one of the most cruel is the one which strikes its fangs into the hearts of parents, and had stricken Mrs. Vane.

All things seem to show, that nature cares for nothing but her own mysterious purposes. For the present, she requires the human race ; and so she puts into the hearts of parents a most powerful love, in order that they may protect and rear their offspring. Soon as reared, that offspring is endowed with greatest love for other mortals of an equal age, in order that another generation may be born—while the first buries its dead. It has done its work, says nature : let it die.

I don't mean to say that Mrs. Vane held views like these, or went through any processes of thought at all. It is the peculiarity of truth, that it affects us whether we believe in it or not. Our feelings and our actions are influenced and determined, every day, by laws and principles which we deny, and persecute our bolder brethren for proclaiming. But she felt the pangs, although she may not have had any definite idea why and whence they came ; and she sought refuge from them.

It was, probably, that mischievous habit, so increasingly prevalent amongst women, of flying to stimulants and opiates of a hundred sorts, in every little physical ache and every trumpery mental pain, which had determined for her the sad source from which she sought relief. Your average woman is not, by any means, the heroine romance

would make her out ; and though her sex has in it plenty of the stuff which martyrs are made out of—as a rule, its individuals have yet to learn that there are many situations of affairs which can and should be simply borne.

It boots not to inquire too curiously into the particulars. Suffice to say, that Mrs. Vane had been a martyr all her life, and had displayed for many a year the finest qualities of heroism. In remembering her weakness, let us not forget her strength. The fallen are, sometimes, far nobler and far stronger than the ones who stand. It would be painful and superfluous to descend to details. Let us pass them by—though not “upon the other side.”

CHAPTER VII.

THE RIVALS.

“Why was I then more wise?”—*Ecclesiastes*.

MEANWHILE, Mr. Harry Bonamy had been letting Cornfield know of his arrival. It was a highly respectable little town—upon the surface—as most country towns are: for, when its inhabitants got tired of being respectable—and intense respectability is rather monotonous—and wanted to enjoy themselves a little, they betook themselves to London, where they were not known. Cornfield, therefore, did not contain many

haunts of dissipation ; but all it did contain, he lost no time in finding out.

There was one public-house, especially ; which, though it had never been caught in any definite delinquency, the magistrates at Brewster Sessions looked upon with some suspicion—possibly, because most of them had sons who wasted too much time there. The Green Dragon was its name, and it possessed a billiard-table. Perhaps this fact contributed to its equivocal repute. Why billiards, which are reckoned so exceedingly genteel in private houses, should be looked upon as so extremely low in public-houses, is a social mystery ; but facts are facts.

Now, Harry was a famous billiard-player ; and somehow, he preferred playing at the Green Dragon to playing at home. Whether it was that he participated in that almost universal sense of its being much more

satisfactory to beat a marker than the finest unprofessional player, or whether it was the barmaid, is a question full of difficulty. But there *was* a barmaid—a young person with a great deal of dishevelled hair, who was well-known in Cornfield—as what resident was not ? and what new comer, when he had been there ten minutes ? By the gentlemen she was pronounced, in jest, a beauty ; by the ladies she was spoken of, with some warmth, as “ a made-up thing.” But she was not made up. She had the good or evil fortune to possess a striking personal appearance — an audacity which ladies seldom overlook in common people of their own sex. But in truth, she was as steady and respectable a girl as ever served behind a bar. Indeed, her manners were exceedingly demure and staid : and although several of the golden youth of the neigh-

bourhood had done their best, and worst, to make them otherwise, they had been unsuccessful. Towards them all she had maintained a dignified reserve; but to what purpose? The world will never believe in a barmaid.

And then, Harry came. What was it, in this Harry Bonamy, that conquered all the women? He had not been in the bar two minutes, when the fortress struck its colours, and surrendered at discretion. The moment the door opened, and revealed his bright blue eyes; and he stopped short, and struck an attitude, expressive of delighted wonder at the lovely vision which he saw before him—the whole thing was done: and a young gentleman, who had been seated at the counter for the last two hours, imbibing quantities of liquor which he didn't want, in the delusive hope that time might thaw

the lady's iciness, perceived and recognised his master at a glance; and rose to make way for him, with a sigh.

Before he said a word, he had reduced her to convulsions of laughter. It was only by some little action of the eyes, but nobody else could have done it. A pigeon had as much chance with a serpent, as a woman with Harry Bonamy.

"You're a very superior young person," were his first words, as he took possession of the seat the young man had vacated.

"Am I?" giggled the young lady.

"I should say a Polly. Yes, decidedly a Polly."

"Well, you're just wrong. My name's Lizzie."

There it was. The gentleman, whom Harry had deposed—or, rather, who had abdicated in his favour—had been trying,

for the last two hours, to ascertain her name : for she was always called Miss Simmons in the bar ; whilst Harry got it in a moment.

“ I knew you were a Lizzie,” exclaimed Harry.

“ You said Polly.”

“ Excuse me, I said Lizzie.”

“ You did nothing of the sort.”

“ I ought to know best, oughtn’t I ?”

“ I don’t see why. I have a pair of ears,” demurred the damsel.

“ Yes, but then you see,” retorted Harry, “ they’re such little ones.”

Miss Simmons tossed her head, and was delighted. The deposed young man boiled over. “ I’ve been gazing at her ears for half-an-hour,” he muttered to himself. “ Why didn’t *I* think of saying that ?”

“ Don’t toss your head about in that way,” expostulated Harry.

"It's my own head. I shall do what I like with it."

"But it's not your own hair."

"Indeed, it is," indignantly exclaimed Miss Simmons; giving it a tug, as if to demonstrate its genuineness.

"Let me try," said Harry; and she let him.

The deposed young man was fit to split with spleen; but had to smile a sickly smile, as if he quite enjoyed the spectacle.

"What do you want?" inquired the barmaid, thinking it was time to come to business. Not that she cared twopence; but there was a little window in the landlord's room, which overlooked the bar.

"What have you?"

"Everything."

"I'll take a very little, in a wine-glass," remarked Harry.

"No, what *do* you want?" beseeched the helpless girl.

"Well," answered her tormentor, "I should like a little hot whiskey cold, with a lump of moist sugar, and a fork in it."

Again the maiden was reduced into hysterics.

The deposed young man could bear no longer; so he asked Miss Simmons what he owed her. She at once came out of her hysterics, and received the young man's money with the most sedate and business-like of airs; and he walked out, disgusted with the sex.

"Nice young man, that," remarked Harry, when the door had closed upon him, with a bang. "Good fun, I should imagine."

"He's a bore," exclaimed the maiden. "He's been here two hours."

"You know you like it."

"I don't like it."

"Why, you wouldn't mind *me* stopping here two hours?"

"Oh, no! but then, you're different."

"How different?"

"You're so funny."

That was it. He was so funny. In life, as on the stage, the low comedian gets the bulk of the applause.

But at this point, the landlord, who had Brewster Sessions always in his mind, and kept a watchful eye on anything like levity, and who had been observing matters through the little window—walked into the bar.

"Hallo, Mr. Thompson," cried the unabashed one.

"My name's Johnson, sir," replied the landlord, with quite a serious air: as if he meant to put a stop to this.

“ Oh, Johnson, is it ? Mine is Walker.”

The landlord did not see the subtle humour of the observation, till Miss Simmons giggled ; when he did.

“ I wish you'd tell this lady to attend to me,” continued Harry.

“ What's your order, sir ?” inquired the landlord, somewhat mollified by his enjoyment of the previous joke.

“ A glass of water and a toothpick,” answered Harry, in a moment. This quite knocked Miss Simmons over. She leant against the beer-machine, and gave way to her uncontrollable amusement. And it polished off the landlord, too ; who laughed, and went back to his parlour. Despite Brewster Sessions, Harry had got over even him.

By this time he was due at Mr. Grey's : so, having drank a glass of bitter ale, he took his leave of the young woman.

“Good-bye, Lizzie,” he said, nodding his brown head.

“Good-bye,” said Lizzie, with quite a sentimental look ; and Harry walked off, having made a conquest at the price of twopence ; whilst the utter failure of the youth he had deposed, had cost that young man three and sixpence.

It was just the same at the Greys : for women are all alike, all the world over, and throughout all classes of society. The qualities which are successful with young persons behind beer-machines are equally triumphant with young ladies in the drawing-room ; and Ernest, who was down again at sessions—where he again earned nothing, at the cost of five pounds—found himself in the position of the youth whom Harry had deposed at the Green Dragon. Save that

Mr. Grey—who had recovered from his megrims, and was there, as genial as ever—never suffered him to lapse altogether out of the proceedings. Mr. Grey was always kind to Ernest. He liked Harry, and was as hearty with him as he was with everybody else ; but I don't think he would have been displeased, if Edith's preference for Harry had been less apparent. But he never dreamt of interfering with his daughter's freedom : for his motto—and a capital one it is, too—was, as far as possible, let everybody do just what they like.

Miss Edith did not join the whist-party, on this occasion : a circumstance which was in itself significant. Her sister took her place ; while she remained in a far corner, winding off her wool from Harry's fingers, and bursting out every now and then into a paroxysm of laughter.

Ernest could not keep his eyes upon the cards. Not even Mr. Bonamy, with his incessant, "Come, come—play," could help him to control them. They would keep wandering off to that far corner where the laughter came from, where the wool got into such inextricable tangles, where the fingers got so interlaced, and where the heads kept getting so extremely close together. It was an extinguished flame—it was a burnt-out fire—it was a dead and buried love ; but Ernest could not help reflecting that she might have had him, if she'd liked ; and that she didn't like, and that she did like this buffoon. Until, at last, he quite exasperated Mr. Bonamy ; who flung down the cards, and said, " Well, if that's London play, it's high time London was abolished."

"Have a cigar, Ernest," recommended

Mr. Grey, who had a shrewd suspicion what was passing through his mind ; and who was thinking much in the same strain himself. For a cigar was Mr. Grey's panacea for all the evils under the sun : and indeed his big ones were, for most of them : but for a wounded vanity, there is no balm. And Ernest sat, and smoked, and glowered ; while Mr. Bonamy beheld the pair with chuckling satisfaction.

It was the same all night ; for Edith actually mixed Harry's grog, and didn't mix Ernest's. Nay, he even caught her taking a sip out of Harry's spoon ; and his gorge rose within him. When she played, it was to Harry that she played ; and when she sang, it was to Harry that she sang : and the grey eyes were never taken off him.

Oh, these women, what a thorn they

are ! and what a foolish girl may make a wise man miserable !

When Ernest paced the ancient lanes that night, and visited the old familiar spots where in his boyhood he had sighed and groaned, a good deal of the olden bitterness revived within him ; and all that dismal railway journey back to town, he felt more keenly than he ever felt before—how much the best the fools have of it in this world.

He saw this clearly ; but he did not see, that if the fools do have more pleasure than the wise, they make more ; and so earn their own. But he had not yet learnt to notice how a fool makes happiness, and how “he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.”

CHAPTER VIII.

DELIRIUM.

"The beginning of the words of (her) mouth is foolishness : and the end of (her) talk is madness."

Ecclesiastes.

It was a great shock to Ernest—was the fall of Mrs. Vane—for he had loved and almost revered her. It is always a great shock, when we find human weakness where we had expected to find human strength. There are some people whom we elevate into little gods, and place their images upon our mental mantel-pieces, and occasionally do our little acts of worship to

them ; until by some unlucky chance they get too rudely bumped, and we are quite astonished that they break in pieces. And too often we don't pick the pieces up, and see what we can make of them ; but take a mean revenge for our own previous folly by consigning the poor pieces to the dust-bin.

It was not so with Ernest. He felt too much sympathy with the poor, broken-hearted lady, who had always been so kind to him. But he was greatly shocked, and strove to find relief in writing.

He had not the heart to start upon another comedy—for comedies are formidable undertakings ; so he tried his hand upon a farce. And very curious sort of work it is, to be describing people tumbling into coal-scuttles, and sitting upon tea-pots, with your brains on fire, and

with your heart as heavy as a lump of lead.

He felt that even law would have been more in harmony with his condition of mind ; but it was useless to think of that : for nobody would give him any work.

The reader will almost have forgotten Ernest was a barrister—he had almost forgotten it himself : or else will think I am a very bungling chronicler, to be writing the biography of one just called, and to be talking about everything but law. But I am strictly accurate. Law is the last thing that a barrister just called is troubled with. His friends—always the last to believe in him—may possibly put odd jobs, of a miscellaneous sort, into his hands ; but the very fact of his being called to the bar, appears to be regarded as conclusive evidence of his incompetence for the dis-

charge of any function in the forensic line. Indeed, it is amusing to observe, how sometimes men who have distinguished themselves in the highest walks of learning, are not trusted with the prosecution of a pick-pocket.

So Ernest set to work, to write—a farce. He had completed the preliminary conversation between two subordinates, with which most plays begin, and had just brought his low comedian on, in trousers of a violent check pattern—for his experience as a spectator and a critic had taught Ernest that the humour of a startling pair of pantaloons is inexhaustible—when he was interrupted by George Drummond, who had looked in on his way to Kensington.

“I thought you were there yesterday,” said Ernest.

“ So I was,” replied his friend. “ I am there every day.”

“ How’s that ?”

“ Well,” George continued, hesitating, “ Mrs. Vane is—ill.”

“ You don’t mean seriously ?”

“ I do mean seriously. The fact is, her nerves have been so shaken that she can’t get over it.” He did not like to blurt plump out the truth ; but he felt conscious of the inadequacy of his explanation, and began to mend it.

“ You see, when the nervous system”—but he couldn’t get any further. It is very difficult to play at blind man’s buff with any spirit, when you have a strong suspicion that the blind man can see through the handkerchief.

“ The fact is,” he said, suddenly, “ she has to be continually watched. It isn’t

safe to leave her. And there's nobody to watch her except Rosamond, and Rosamond's tired out."

"Can I be of any use?" asked Ernest.

"To be sure you can," returned the surgeon, "if it's only keeping company with me. I'm going up there for an hour now, just to see how things are going on. Then I shall go again this evening, and most probably shall have to sit up all the night. If you don't mind, I wish you'd come and sit up with me—part of it: for its uncommon lonely, and my thoughts are not particularly pleasant company just now."

"Of course I will," said Ernest.

And so it was arranged. The low comedian, in the violent plaid pantaloons, was not perhaps so hilarious as was desirable; but Ernest made up for the weakness of his jokes by giving him a little extra

crockery to smash ; and after all, it didn't matter much, for he was never acted ; and exists now only in the form of oxygen, and hydrogen, and nitrogen, or whatsoever gases ink and paper are composed of.

In the evening, he went out to Kensington. The surgeon was already there, and he saw no one else ; for both Rosamond and the servant had been sent to bed, to get a little rest. Mrs. Vane, it seemed, had fallen into a calm sleep ; so Ernest and the doctor made themselves as comfortable as circumstances would permit, in an adjoining room.

George Drummond was still very melancholy ; but it is marvellous what even a few weeks can do towards assuaging even the profoundest sorrow. There is a wonderful recuperative power about nature ; and there is an everlasting tendency in life to swing

back out of violent emotions, either painful or pleasurable, into the calm and regular tick-tack of every day. Life is, after all, a very commonplace and automatic affair ; and very few things matter very much. Our joys and griefs are like its luxuries and wants, whilst mere existence is its bread-and-butter.

It is positively painful to reflect what mere machines we are—how all our actions and emotions may be traced to currents of the blood and conditions of the nerves. Our very grief is nothing but a mental process. Somebody we love dies suddenly. The continuity of our existence is disturbed, and all our thoughts and feelings are startled into confusion. Our grief is nothing more than the working of that chaos into order. It is while we are dissociating the dead from all the plans, and dreams, and fancies

which are life, and into which they have been twined and woven in our minds, that we are mournful. As soon as we get accustomed to those plans, and dreams, and fancies, quite apart from them, we grieve no more. Our lives have got back into order, and resumed their continuity, and tick-tack goes the pendulum again.

This is why the worst of certainties is better than suspense—why death itself is not so hard to bear as cruel separations, whether caused by distance, evil chance, or man's unthinking inhumanity. The mental process cannot be begun : it has no starting-point : there is no single, stern, unalterable fact, like death, to stop the current of the life, and turn its course. All is confusion, and remains so. This is partly why, to separate two human beings who profoundly wish to be together, is about the greatest

outrage man can do on man. And this, on some poor pretext of discretion, policy, or false morality, are parents doing every day. It is a wickedness under the sun.

Thus, though the surgeon was still melancholy, he could take his part in conversation. Every now and then, there shot into his heart those awful flashes of profound despair, which rush into our souls each now and then, when we have been forgetting for a while some dreadful sorrow. That blank desolation which we feel the moment we awake, and our returning senses bring the grief back, fresh and poignant—that mute misery which pervades our hearts, as soon as we have laughed our first laugh after some calamity—and worst of all, that terrible, quick stab of horror, which shoots through us in the midst of mirth and revelry: all these the surgeon felt. But

he could smoke his pipe, and not show much upon his face.

"I'd no idea that Mrs. Vane was so ill," began Ernest.

She has been delirious for a week, and never tasted food, to speak of," said his friend. "It's my belief she won't get better."

"Do you mean that?"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, it would perhaps be the best ending."

"I've no doubt it would. Were she to live, she would not keep her reason. You see, all her life has been a secret—a suppression; and now that she has, as it were, burst, she will never regain self-control."

"I didn't know her life had been a secret," answered Ernest.

"I forgot. I didn't till this week. But still, you must have felt there was some mystery about her."

"Of course I did. And has she told you what it is?"

"Yes," said the surgeon.

Ernest was not less curious than average mortals, though he was able better to conceal his curiosity; but here it was quite evident, although he smoked on and said nothing: perhaps, *because* he smoked on and said nothing.

"I can't tell you what it is," said George.

"Of course not," agreed Ernest. "You were told in confidence."

"No, not in confidence," replied the other. "In delirium."

The two smoked on.

"I have heard many things, this week,"

resumed the surgeon. "The secrets which have been kept locked for years, have all been broken open in a week. But I shall tell them no man."

"I shall never ask you."

And again the two smoked on. The clock ticked loudly on the mantel-piece, and the cat purred loudly on the hearth-rug. At last, Ernest broke the silence.

"If Mrs. Vane should——" and he stopped.

"Die?" said George Drummond.

"Yes, if she should die, what would become of Rosamond?" For Ernest found that he was thinking a good deal of Rosamond.

"Oh, Rosamond is provided for," returned the surgeon.

"Is she? how?—but perhaps that also is a secret."

"No, I don't think that is. Have you ever met a grey old man here—Mr. Furnival?"

"I've heard of him. He's a solicitor."

"And the trustee of Mrs. Vane's marriage—I should say, of Mrs. Vane's settlement," and George bit his lip, and coloured, and of course Ernest knew all about it.

In this way secrets are let out. We ask for confidence. Would we betray it? The suggestion is a personal affront. No, we should never breathe a word of it. On this assurance, we are trusted: and the first thing that we do is, by some momentary slip or casual awkwardness, to publish the whole mystery. The wise man does not trust his dearest friend. Alas, delirium has no discretion.

"I was going on to say that Mr. Furnival

would have the charge of Rosamond, until she is of age," continued George.

"What sort of a man is he?" inquired Ernest.

"I don't know, but I should think a stern, austere man, from the looks of him."

Another silence fell upon them. Both felt very awkward. They wouldn't have believed that they could possibly have felt so awkward before one another as they did. George was disconcerted by his innocent betrayal of perhaps the sacreddest of trusts—the secrets which delirium confides to its physician. Ernest wanted to appear as if the revelation did not dwell upon his mind—indeed, as if he had not noticed it, if that were possible; but it was useless to endeavour to appear as if he was not thinking of it. He could think of nothing else.

Mrs. Vane not married! All the preju-

dices of his education were stirred to their very depths. He could have believed it of anybody else in the world, but of Mrs. Vane he could not. For she had stood to him as the embodiment of all that was pure, and good, and holy ; and an unmarried mother stood to him as the embodiment of all that was impure, and wrong, and horrible.

When a little man is placed in a high office—as so often happens—the office does not raise him, but he lowers the office. Similarly, when a little speck is found in a great character, the greatness does not carry off the littleness ; the littleness makes shipwreck of the greatness. The mean mind which is detected in one nobleness, stands higher in the estimation of the world, than the noble mind which is detected in one weakness : for the world is such a foolish world, that it is more im-

pressed by the astonishment of half an hour than by the conduct of a lifetime. "Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour : so does a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour."

Ernest, I am glad to say, was not so foolish as the world ; and he declined to think that Mrs. Vane was either weak or wicked, because that which he considered both was suddenly revealed in her. He set the woman that he knew, against the fact he had discovered ; and the woman turned the balance, in his mind. How is it with you, reader ? Probably, the fact weighs down the woman. But it should not. For our general opinion of a man or woman is more likely to be right, than is our judgment on a single act. We may not be able to reconcile the act with the

opinion : that may only show the inconsistency of human character ; or may be, our incompetence to fathom it. There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in any of our philosophies.

The silence was prolonged. The clock again ticked loudly on the mantel-piece, the cat again purred loudly on the hearthrug. The smoke wreathed itself around the room. A dead stillness reigned.

When suddenly, they heard a sweet voice singing, just outside the door.

It startled them ; for it was after twelve, and everybody was in bed. It was a voice which they had never heard before ; but it was so sweet that it could not frighten them, and sang so low that they could only just make out the words : for it was singing to itself, not them. But they *could* make them out, and they were these :—

“ He is dead and gone, lady,
He is dead and gone ;
At his head a green-grass turf,
At his heels a stone.”

Although, of course, they recognised them as familiar, under the peculiar circumstances they could neither of them make out at the moment what they came from ; but they knew directly, when the surgeon gently moved the door, to see from whence the voice proceeded, and in walked — Ophelia !

Yes, Ophelia. Ophelia, in her white dress, and with her white unconscious face. Ophelia, with her flowers. All complete. Not only with the flowers in her hand, but with the sorrow in her heart.

“ Hush !” said the surgeon, as an exclamation broke from Ernest’s lips. “ Hush ! she is still asleep.”

For it was Mrs. Vane.

Then, with a sudden change, the voice resumed, with a wild gaiety even more pathetic than its grief—

“ Good morrow, 'tis Saint Valentine's day,
All in the morning betime,
And I a maid at your window,
To be your Valentine.”

And then the voice stopped singing, and said plaintively, “ We must be patient : but I cannot choose but weep, to think they should lay him i' the cold ground.”

There was something weird about the apparition ; and Ernest almost shuddered when the figure walked straight up to him, and gazing at him with unconscious eyes, said, “ There's rosemary, that's for remembrance ; pray you, love, remember ; and there is pansies, that's for thoughts.”

And there the pansies were, and Ernest had to take them ; and he has them now, and he *has* remembered, and he *has* thought,

and he has blessed the poor, distracted lady, whose last gift they were.

Then, turning to the surgeon, she said suddenly, "There's rue for you, and here's some for me. You may wear your rue with a difference."

And George felt the difference; and knew, the mother's love had been a greater love than his.

"Come, my coach!" resumed the voice. "Good-night, ladies. Good-night, sweet ladies. Good-night, good-night!"

And she turned round, and left the room.

The surgeon followed her, with noiseless step. She went along the passage, singing :—

"And will he not come again?
And will he not come again?
No, no, he is dead,
Go to thy death-bed,
He never will come again."

And the poor lady walked, with sure, unerring step, to that mysterious room, which Rosamond had christened "Blue-beard's Chamber."

The drawers were all unlocked now, and a number of them being open, George could see their contents.

They were full of dresses, suit on top of suit — stage-dresses, ornaments, and properties: and in the corner of one was a heap of play-bills. Scattered round the room were more, and Ernest — who had followed George — observed that all of them had one name in them: "Helen Douglas." And remembering the discussion at the club, one mystery — the interest that Mrs. Vane took in the theatre — was solved: for she had been an actress.

She took off Ophelia's dress, and carefully replaced it in the wardrobe. She

locked up the drawers ; and still unconscious, walked along the corridor, still singing to herself :—

“ No, no, he is dead,
Go to thy death-bed,
He never will come again.”

And she walked on into her own room, and she did go to her death-bed ; and lay down in it, and was at rest.

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. VANE.

"So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun."—*Ecclesiastes*.

It is time the reader was told something more of Mrs. Vane. The secrets she revealed to George and Rosamond in her delirium, which George felt he had no right to tell to Ernest, need not be kept sacred from the reader. It would be painful, and indeed beyond the writer's powers, to tell them as they fell from Mrs. Vane's own lips. Moreover, the bald facts, nar-

rated as they were disclosed, without the accompaniment of the pathetic voice and plaintive cries which uttered them, would not create a right impression of the truth : for—contrary to popular belief—facts are the most misleading things in the world. And so, I shall proceed to state them in my own way, making my own comments, which may possibly be different from the reader's.

Mrs. Vane was of low origin. Amongst coarse people, of rough manners and dull wits, she had sprung up—a miracle of grace, refinement, and intelligence : as if to contradict and put to rout all theories of inheritance—but no doubt, really, a confirmation of them. Genius springs up in this way, loveliness springs up in this way—often. No one can tell where it comes from ; but we may be sure that it is the

development of something which lies hidden in its lineage further back than we can penetrate.

Her natural disposition led her to the stage. Her parents, who were clods, were horror-struck. They wanted her to spend her youth in tying up small parcels of adulterated grocery, behind a counter, in a back street ; and to end by marrying some one of their own degree, and so perpetuate a race of boors ; and be a good daughter, and a respectable woman. But it was impossible. There is no genius in human nature more pronounced, and more unconquerable, than a genius for the stage : and on the stage she went. Her parents simply cast her off, and left her to her own devices ; with a pious curse upon her—for they were religious people—as an undeserving daughter, who had thrown away

her chances, and deliberately chosen an abandoned life.

She worked hard : for those were days of actresses, and not of amateurs. It was not enough, then, to have a pretty face and a fine figure and to wear expensive dresses—to make just one failure on the London boards, and then to tour the country as a “star” performer, heralded by flaming posters and an agent in advance. She toiled away at her profession, year by year; and thought herself rewarded for a twelve-month’s labour by a line of praise, at which some modern leading ladies, just promoted from the ballet, would turn up their noses. But she succeeded ultimately. If she had been now upon the stage, she would have been in the first rank : then she was only in the second.

It is strange, how second parts are now

despised : when what a reputation would attend success in them ! Why don't a few of our real actresses devote their whole attention to them, and leave first parts undisputed to the ballet-girls ? Better to win credit in the second rank, than to do murder in the first.

Second parts were Mrs. Vane's profession. She was one of that small body of true artists, who adopt the second place as that which they are fitted for, and do not grumble or repine that they are not conspicuous in the first ; but are content to fill the second well.

At last, she gained a recognised position : and, as we have heard, one critic at the *Owls* remembered her as having been the best Ophelia he had ever seen. But still, her parents never came to see her. Fancy one's daughter playing Ophelia, when she

might have been selling adulterated grocery! She won much admiration privately, and she had many offers of marriage ; and the eyes which we have seen so sadly looking into the past, then sparkled merrily, and blithely looked into the future. One admirer in particular was most devoted to her ; and a worthy little man he was, and very much she pitied him ; but he too was refused : whereupon he withered up into the snuffy little gentleman, who was the only one besides the critic who remembered Helen Douglas at the club.

And why did she refuse them all ? Because she was in love. In love with one who, on the whole, was worthy of her love—a fine, handsome, young fellow, with the heart of a man. And it was real love on both sides ; not the conventional sort of sentiment on which two average young

people do their courting, under the strict supervision of mamma and papa, and according to all the ordinances of society—not the mild attachment upon which the average young couple marry, if papa allows them; and don't think of one another, if papa objects. It was true love, was theirs; and so, its course did not run smooth.

And here arose the difficulty, of which ruin was the end. They got engaged to one another, and the father would not hear of the engagement. He had planned his son's life out, as if it were his own; and scouted the idea of there being any real love between them: it was passion, sensual passion—which ought not to be countenanced. Nay, he forbade their seeing one another. Then, the son—who was a man—rebelled; and he was turned out of his father's firm, and lost his means of living.

For a while he struggled on, but all of them were miserable ; for the father really loved his son, and only acted from a sense of duty. The son broke down. He could not bear the anger of the father. His duty was quite plain : it was to split away entirely from the father, leaving him to bear the consequences of his tyranny and folly—the responsibility of which was clearly nature's, which had made him foolish and tyrannical : but he had not the strength to do his duty.

Helen saw that he was miserable, and encouraged him to go back to his father : and he made the grand mistake of all his life, and went. Of course, this weakness only made the father sterner in his tyranny, and firmer in his sense of duty. He demanded from his son a promise that he would not marry Helen Douglas, and the son complied ;

and having stultified his manhood, was received back into dignity and honour.

Oh, is there any wickedness in this world comparable to the wickedness of parents? are there any wrongs which cry so loud for vengeance, as the wrongs which parents do their children? how many hearts are broken, and how many lives are blighted, by the well-meant tyranny of fathers and of mothers? When will parents learn they have no property or title in their children? They are the instruments by which their children's lives are brought into the world. Once there, the lives no more belong to them than do the feelings, appetites, and dispositions which compose them. The life of every man belongs to him, and not his father. For the father to coerce or harass it, is not the sacred duty which it is regarded, but a sin. The slave has been emancipated

from his master; but when will the son be emancipated from his father, and the daughter from her mother?

To what did the old man's oppression lead? to what oppression always leads to, and to what it justifies—deceit. They tried to keep away from one another, but of course they could not. A man may pluck out his right eye, or cut off his right hand—to use the favourite similes—but no man can pluck out love. No man ought to try: for if the mutilation of the body be a sin, how great a sin must be the mutilation of the heart?

But nature has provided against such a wrong, by making it impossible. You may make yourself utterly wretched; you may reverse the dictum of the Preacher, and say, “Better is the wandering of the desire than the sight of the eyes;” you may oppress

and harass it : but you can never pluck it out. To talk of duty and religion in connection with it, is of no avail. As well say it is duty and religion never to be hungry, or to thirst, or to be sleepy. Nature laughs at you.

The son kept his promise. He did not marry Helen Douglas, but he lived with her. They did not come to this arrangement without many an anxious thought and many a qualm of conscience. It was not the companionship that troubled them ; for all the forms and ceremonies and municipal arrangements of society are shrivelled up into their true proportions by a touch of genuine feeling. It was the deceit which troubled them : for even when it cannot be avoided—and it cannot always, or we ought to abolish the detective police—deceit is always a revolting thing. But they were

left no option, if the son was not to break his father's heart : which, as a matter of morality, of course he should have done.

They had one daughter—Agnes : and she was their pride. And for a while, they were as happy as they could be, under the peculiar circumstances of their situation. Of course, the world would take no notice of them ; and perhaps the world was right ; for it must vindicate its forms. But fortunately for her comfort, Helen Douglas was upon the stage ; and beneath a thousand petty rivalries and jealousies, there is as much real charity and human brotherhood upon the stage as anywhere in life ; and she was made to feel her unconventional condition less than otherwise she might ; though she was made to feel it, even there.

But when she looked into her daughter's face, and by-and-by began to feel her

daughter's love, she did not heed the world; for she felt, God had made no difference between her mother's love and any other; and she knew that she was pure and holy in the only sight which knows where purity and goodness are.

The bright eyes were not destined to be bright much longer. The deceit was soon discovered; and the father's wrath was, naturally, greater than before.

It would be painful to describe the slow degrees by which the heart of the young man was crushed. There is no more deplorable spectacle than that of a well-meaning father working on his son's affection, to pursue his own ideas of what is right: unless the son should chance to be a daughter. Enough to say, they felt how bitter was oppression, when "on the side of their oppressors there was power."

The father was supremely shocked. They must be torn away from one another, at all cost—ay, even at the cost of justice, reason, and humanity.

The son was in his hands. Those miserable pecuniary considerations, which so complicate all moral problems, were upon the father's side. The son was conscious that he could not keep a wife, if he were turned out of his father's business—for his previous experience had taught him how difficult it is for a man who cannot work with his hands to make a livelihood without the help of friends; and the idea of living on his wife he could not bear. It was a foolish pride, and ruined both their lives; but pride *is* foolish, and its consequences terrible.

The father did not scruple to make use of his advantage, to compel the son to leave

what he regarded as a life of sin. He would have been deterred by nothing—he would not have scrupled to make use of rack and stake, if rack and stake had been in fashion. For Helen Douglas he cared nothing. She was an abandoned woman. For his grandchild he cared nothing. It was a child of sin. He would have turned them both into the streets, without a rag upon their backs, and thought no more about them.

Don't think, reader, that I am describing a hard-hearted person. On the contrary, he was an upright, conscientious man, respected by his fellow-citizens and honoured by his friends; a man who did much public work, and gave away large sums. No monster, but what is called a Christian gentleman.

Nineteen people out of twenty have not

an idea how thin is the coating of education and religion which overlies the brutal passions of our nature, and how very near the surface of the gentlest and the most refined amongst us is ferocity. We flatter ourselves that we are in an advanced state of culture, and of quite a different species to poor outcast heathens ; and in truth we have overlaid ourselves with a very fine veneer of civilization, beautifully polished with the gloss of Christianity. We shine again with sleekness ; but just scratch the coating with your finger-nail, and you get down to the original barbarian. And nothing so effectually strips away this peel as an offence against the current notions of morality. It brings you, in a moment, face to face with all the blackest passions of the human heart ; passions which nobody attempts to govern, because everybody ima-

gines they are virtue ; passions which are consecrated by the precept and example of all literature ; passions which have been embalmed in noblest poetry ; passions which are inculcated and applauded by the whole of civilized humanity ; passions which religion almost blesses ; passions which stand to many people for the very embodiment of virtue and purity, and are looked upon as the essential instincts of a decent person : and which, all the time, are the most brutal and base passions in our nature. In none are they so unrestrainedly developed as in women and religious people. None other are so fierce in their malignity and so revengeful in their wrath ; and all the virulence of outraged piety was poured out by the father on the son.

The son broke down. Don't think that he broke down at once. Don't think he

didn't feel that he was breaking down. Don't think he didn't struggle. Don't despise him.

He submitted to his father's terms, which were, that he should never see or hear from Helen Douglas or his own child in this world again, upon condition that the father settled on them an annuity. The compact was then carried out, and Helen Douglas left the stage, and took her child and bore it on her broken heart—he knew not where. And having done this thing, the father went down on his knees, and gave God thanks.

It was not until after they were separated, Rosamond was born; her father never knew of her existence.

And when the two were parted, then the lies began—those lies which spring up, who knows where? which always come

between two people who are separated. Each heard stories of the other's words, and deeds, and writings, which were told by lips incapable of falsehood, but which had no truth about them; and the two were separated in their hearts.

But when the father saw the awful grief which fell upon his son—the anguish of a heart that yearns, it knows not where, to some small spot in space, where some one is it loves—the horror of a man who had betrayed his manhood, sacrificed his love, and sold his soul—he was amazed and horrified; and if a pious man's heart ever softens, then his softened towards his son. He thought the son might perhaps be happier if he heard that they were dead, and so he told him that they were. And then, the son who loved the father turned upon the father who loved him, and said,

“You are a murderer.” But he believed him, and was happier to think them dead ; and then, with that belief in their decease, began the process of forgetting them ; and time healed up the wound, although it left a scar.

But truth is not without a witness in the world. Wrongs do not always go unpunished. The son did not love the father any more. And having worked this ill, the old man died, respected as an exemplary citizen, and unregretted by his son.

And still the bright sun rises in the morning, and the flowers open, and the birds break forth in song ; and still we men get up, and go about our daily avocations. We know that these things are, and still we are not mad. It is wonderful that we can throw them off. It is a blessed thing

that we can strip them from our minds, for who could think of them and keep his senses? We can do nothing to prevent them. God does not interfere. It is in His name they are done. His patience is the only thing by which we can take comfort. The only grain of consolation is the Preacher's word: "If thou seest the violent perverting of judgment and justice, marvel not at the matter: for He that is higher than the highest regardeth."

CHAPTER X.

THE OLD PROBLEM.

“That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out?”—*Ecclesiastes*.

THEY buried Mrs. Vane beside her daughter, underneath the same white marble tomb. And Ernest, this time, stood beside the grave, along with George and Rosamond. It was a beautiful bright morning, and I don't think any of them felt altogether wretched. To two of them, who had been told her history—and even to the third, who only knew that she had been unhappy, and remembered her sad eyes—I fancy

that there came some meaning into that old word which sounds so dreadful, but is so consoling—"Better is the day of death than the day of one's birth."

To one who looks on such a life as Mrs. Vane's, and thinks of all the million other lives which are lived out as wearily, what terror is there in annihilation? What prospect can be brighter than the prospect of release from the injustice and oppressions of this awful life? What prospect could by any possibility be more terrible than the prospect of that overladen heart being doomed to bear its burden on into another world? It surely was much happier, to think it was at rest. And Ernest felt that George's creed was not so gloomy as it had appeared.

And as he stood beside that open grave, and thought of the fair lady who was lying

in it—the ideal to his mind, until the last sad weeks, of every grace of holiness, and purity, and womanliness—he could not help being puzzled with the problem which has puzzled wise men since the world began, and only been determined by the fools.

What virtue is there in these social forms, which grip us round with hooks of steel? and how much deference is due to them? Society must have its forms and ceremonies, or all would be confusion. And if these forms are necessary, ought they not to be obeyed? And yet, upon the other hand, they are but forms at best, and only represent realities. Supposing the two come into collision, and the facts of nature set themselves against the fictions of society: what then? It is the law of God against the law of man: to which should one be loyal? Clearly to the first. But what be-

comes of order, then? You only get a little further from the difficulty by relaxing forms, and fitting them as easily as possible to facts. However loose the forms are, they are forms; and cannot possibly be made to suit all sets of circumstances; and yet how can we admit exceptions?

Ernest saw no answer to these difficulties. He was driven to think, that as the universe of nature is one mass of compromises and contradictions — of struggling species and conflicting laws—so also must be the universe of man. But one thing he saw clearly—the folly of the world, which says: there is no difficulty in the matter—it is quite settled—we decline to acknowledge the existence of any facts which are inconsistent with that settlement—and if you dare to disagree with us, you must be cast out of society.

If Mrs. Vane's sad life had served no other purpose, it had taught a young man charity, who was inclined to be too stern. And that was something. What the old man thinks, is of small consequence: he represents the past. But what the young man thinks, is everything: he represents the future.

There was another person present at the funeral of Mrs. Vane; and he returned with them to the white house: and that was Mr. Furnival.

Ernest did not like the looks of him. He was a dry, austere old man; who, anyone could see, believed in everlasting punishment, and evidently thought that Mrs. Vane had gone to it. When Ernest reflected that this person was to have the charge of Rosamond, he felt exceedingly uncomfortable. But his anxiety, as is the

case with most anxieties, was superfluous. This person was not destined to have charge of Rosamond.

He requested George and Ernest to withdraw, as he desired to have a few words with Miss Vane in private. A few weeks ago, Rosamond would have been alarmed at the prospect of being shut up in a room alone with this portentous individual ; but recent events had aged her wonderfully, and she took her seat in front of him, and awaited his communication with perfect self-possession.

Mr. Furnival cleared his throat, and settled his white neckcloth.

There is always something suspicious about people who wear white neckcloths. The obtrusive assumption of the harmlessness of the dove naturally suggests the subtlety of the serpent. Rosamond dis-

liked him before he opened his mouth, and felt sure that he was going to say something disagreeable. And Rosamond was right.

"My dear Miss Vane," began the lawyer, with an attempt at a paternal air which only suggested the birch-rod, "I presume you are aware of my position in regard to your late mother?"

"I have always understood that you were the trustee of mamma's marriage settlement," said Rosamond.

"Which, now you understand, was *not* a marriage settlement, but a settlement upon your mother by your grandfather."

Rosamond blushed, and said nothing.

"Your late lamented grandfather," resumed Mr. Furnival, "was my particular friend; and a more honourable, upright, and devout man never lived. He not only provided for your mother in the most bene-

volent and charitable spirit, but he also provided for her child."

"His grandchild," put in Rosamond.

"His grandchild," said the lawyer, after a short pause; as though he could not controvert the fact, but would have liked to do; and only admitted it, as it were, under protest and without prejudice.

"I say, he provided for her child," repeated Mr. Furnival, with his steely eyes fixed closely upon Rosamond. But Rosamond was not a lawyer, and she did not apprehend his meaning: so the other had to try again.

"That child's name was Agnes."

"Well," replied the girl, impatient of his pauses and his steely glances, "it was Agnes. What then?"

"Yours is Rosamond."

The lawyer stopped again; and evidently

thought that he had made it obvious to the meanest capacity, what he meant. But Rosamond was quite at sea still.

“Well,” she said.

“You see,” resumed Mr. Furnival, in an explanatory tone, as though the matter only wanted explanation to be acquiesced in as a thing of course. “You see, *you* were not born when this settlement was made—and that—and that, in short, is why it doesn’t provide for you.”

“What !” she exclaimed, as some suspicion of the truth began to dawn upon her mind. “Am I to understand that I have nothing to live upon ?”

“That’s it,” said the lawyer. “I didn’t like to put it in those words, but that’s just it.”

“You really mean that I am not included in the settlement ?”

“Not mentioned, or alluded to by implication. You see, nobody knew anything about you.”

“Then what becomes of all the furniture and household things?”

“They revert to the estate of the settlor; or rather, to the person whom he has appointed to receive them, on the determination of the trust.”

“And I have nothing?” inquired Rosamond.

“You have your clothes,” replied the lawyer, “any money that your mother may have given you, and any articles that have been purchased specially for you. Indeed, you may include whatever you particularly want. I may say—though perhaps I have no right—that nobody will question your discretion.”

“And beside this, I have nothing?”

"Hem," coughed Mr. Furnival.

"Nothing?" repeated Rosamond.

"Nothing," acquiesced the lawyer.

The girl was silent for a moment, and then asked, "Did my mother know of this?"

"It was only on your sister's death," returned the other, "I discovered she did not, and I recommended her to set about making some provision for you, which she did. But she has died so soon herself, it really is not much to speak of. In effect, it's only fifty pounds;" and Mr. Furnival proceeded to dole out that sum upon the table, with as much formality as if it had been fifty thousand.

Rosamond sat staring at him, with clasped hands.

"But what am I to do?" at last she stammered out.

"Hem," coughed the lawyer.

Then, suddenly she seized him by the arm, and said, "Who is my father?"

"Really, Miss Vane," answered Mr. Furnival, "that I have no right to tell you."

"Is he alive?"

"I really cannot say."

It would have been about as useful to entreat a stone wall as that Methodistical old lawyer, so Rosamond desisted. But the girl was frightened at the prospect which she saw before her, and she clung even to that old withered straw.

"You are my guardian, aren't you?" said the girl. "It is your duty to look after me."

"My duty ends with my trusteeship," said the lawyer, "and as I have observed, the trust is at an end already. Your exis-

tence was not contemplated by the instrument in any way." He evidently regarded that existence as an irrelevance and impropriety, and Rosamond felt dreadfully alone.

"But you will never leave me to my fate?" she cried.

"I shall be always glad to give you my advice," replied the other. "Under ordinary circumstances, I would have done something for you—helped you to procure some situation or employment—but you see, your position is unfortunate."

Yes, Rosamond saw that.

"I cannot conscientiously ask anybody to receive you into their employment."

"Why not?"

"Because, of course," returned the lawyer, "you will see, you cannot be admitted into respectable society."

The girl gazed at him, for a moment, with

wide-open eyes ; and then the blood rushed up into her face and neck, and she went crimson.

“I see,” she said, at last.

“Of course, it’s not your fault,” continued Mr. Furnival, “but it is the inevitable consequence of what has taken place. Society is not to blame, and you are not to blame——”

“But I am to be cast out?”

“Well, not cast out exactly,” said the lawyer, “but it is quite impossible that you should be admitted. Would you be so good as to oblige me with a receipt for fifty pounds?”

And Rosamond obliged him, and he took his leave.

Of course she knew what her position was, as soon as Mrs. Vane revealed it to her ; and of course she felt that she would

have some difficulty with society ; but she had a vague reliance upon human justice and good-nature, fostered by a thousand books and newspapers and plays. She had no idea that in the case of one in her position, human justice and good-nature exist only upon paper, and in the mouths of actors, and in the applause of noisy audiences, who, in their actual lives, bear witness to the very tyranny they have approved the dramatist for reprehending. She knew the world would look upon her with some coldness and suspicion, but she never dreamt that it was wholly heartless, and would calmly pass her by as something too noisome to be touched. And when the feeling of respectable society, as represented by Mr. Furnival, became apparent to her, it was with a shock she felt the truth. She thought that she was living

in a Christian land, and suddenly she found that she was not. The cant of charity and piety with which society is lacquered over was stripped off, and she beheld for the first time the brutal monster underneath.

And with this vision came a sense of shame—a sense of burning, blinding shame. Although she was alone, she blushed from head to heel, and hid her face amongst the cushions of the sofa, and wished nothing better than to creep away into some quiet spot and die.

Her conscience seemed to smite her ; for conscience, which some people hold infallible, is continually smiting those who have done nothing—nay, who have done right. It is principally a keen sense of the opinion of others. Who feels a twinge of conscience when the world applauds ? who does not when the world condemns ? Set us

amongst those who are of our opinion, and we feel assured ; but set us amongst those who differ from us, and we feel dismayed. There is no more arrant will-o'-the-wisp than this same conscience, which is often the accumulated folly of the world. The only conscience that is worth the name, is our unbiassed judgment when we are alone, and cannot be deterred by fear, or influenced by favour.

And there came into the heart of Rosamond a sickly dread that even George felt just the same to her, but was concealing it ; that Ernest, too, would shrink away from her if he but knew—and he must know. On that she was determined. She would tell him.

And so, when Ernest came to say good-bye to her—for George was stopping in the house—she took him to the door ; and

when he had passed through it, and was standing on the step, she suddenly said, "Ernest."

Ernest turned.

"I don't want you to turn. Stand like you were. I want to tell you something you don't know."

And then, when he had turned his back to her, with a great effort, and as rapidly as she could speak the words, she said, "My mother was not married to my father. I am illegitimate. Good-bye."

And then she shut the door, and sat down in the hall, and burst into a flood of tears.

Ah, Ernest had a harder nut to crack that night than he had ever tried his teeth upon before. Are mortals, from their cradles, doomed to bear these dreadful loads of shame and misery, or are they but the

consequences of man's foolish laws? Do human beings by the million do such shameful deeds, in spite of warning, law, and man's anathema, or is the shame the vain imagination of mankind? The problem which seems to have made even Jesus hesitate, which has puzzled every thoughtful man in every age, but which the fools so easily dispose of, puzzled Ernest too. *He* could not solve it. *He* was silent, too. *He*, too, stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground. And as he walked along, the summer twilight deepened into dusk, and every street corner that he passed demanded its solution. I don't know whether it is so with all young men, but Ernest could not drive it from his mind. How could those laws be just which doom one-half a sex to shame and degradation, and which set the

other half upon a pinnacle of Pharisaic virtue?

He broke his teeth against this world-old difficulty of the true relations of the sexes, which must yet be solved if human happiness is ever to be approached ; which all respectable society declares is solved already, but which is no more solved to-day than ever it was ; and never will be, until men will put aside religious prejudice, and recognise the patent facts of nature.

CHAPTER XI.

JUSTICE.

"I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there."—*Ecclesiastes*.

ONE of the characteristics which contributed not a little to the popularity of Harry Bonamy, was his proficiency with his fists. It was considered so "English," and so "manly," as we are so fond of styling actions which are brutal, foolish, and degrading. The popularity of personal violence is something amazing, and is a striking confirmation of the proposition which I have advanced before, that we

are only savages veneered with Christianity.

When the hero knocks the villain down and gives him a black eye, how delighted everybody is—especially the women! how the newspapers enjoy it! for literary men are the most bloodthirsty of all men, except parsons. I have even heard a judge of the Supreme Court of England, sitting on the commission of the Queen's peace at the time, deliberately recommend a prisoner to settle all his differences with his fists—to use the learned functionary's own expression—"like an Englishman." But we exemplify our innate barbarism in the most amusingly unconscious way, when we strap men on triangles who have been guilty of gross violence, and when they are quite helpless calmly do the very thing to them which we are trying to persuade them

not to do to others. We dignify our barbarism by the name of justice, whilst all the time it is the very passion we are punishing.

There is no greater foolishness than this sort of violence, which proves nothing, except that one man is stronger than another and that he is a ruffian. No one ever stops to think that, in a fair fight, it must sometimes happen that the villain beats the hero; and the only reason why the hero generally comes off conqueror is, that he takes a cowardly advantage of the villain's physical inferiority.

Harry had a good deal of the conventional Englishman about him; and was fond of playing hero in those claptrap situations where applause is certain. How few people reflect, that in real life the villain sometimes wears the aspect of the hero, and

the real hero is mistaken for the villain. Applause is no criterion of virtue ; and the noblest men amongst us are sometimes the infamous. The hero is hissed off the stage.

But people like Harry don't go in for real heroism. They don't know what it is, and never think about it. They accept the notions current in society, that certain things are fine and manly, and that certain other things are paltry and ignoble ; and they reap the reward of their thoughtlessness in universal popularity and honour.

An escapade of Harry's, which, had it been Ernest's, would have been attended by expulsion from genteel society, is the text which has suggested the foregoing sermon.

He had cultivated the acquaintance of Miss Simmons, the presiding goddess at

the sign of the Green Dragon ; and with such success that he prevailed upon her to accompany him, one evening, to a place of public entertainment called "The Star." It was a sort of music-hall, the floor of which was covered with small tables for refreshments ; and at one of these he and the young lady were established, comfortably chatting and enjoying the performances—for Harry was one of those people who are able to enjoy a music-hall performance—when a waiter, with a tray of glasses on his upturned hand, came pushing past them ; and quite innocently, but a little roughly, bumped against Miss Simmons.

It was an uncouth Yorkshire place ; and no one ever dreamt of begging anybody's pardon at the Star. Nor was there that distinction between the waiters and the company which is noticeable in the more

refined saloons of London — where the deferential courtesy of decent and industrious serving-men to flaunting and disreputable women, is one of the pathetic satires of our social life.

Accordingly, the waiter — who was a coarse, homespun fellow — pushed on with his glasses.

“Why the devil don’t you look where you are going to?” bellowed Harry, in a voice that went all over the establishment.

The waiter looked at him ; and seeing that he was “a gentleman,” said something about being sorry and an accident.

“Beg this lady’s pardon,” shouted Harry, who felt every inch a hero : for the eyes of everybody were upon him, and the comic song which was in progress had to be suspended.

This was too much for the homespun waiter. It had been as much as he could swallow, to apologise to Harry; but when he looked upon Miss Simmons — who, I have already said, was gifted with a somewhat striking and conspicuous personal appearance — he could not resist saying, “I’d like to know who *she* is, to be so particular!”

This was Harry’s opportunity. Here was every ingredient of a claptrap situation : a respectable young woman had been wantonly insulted—the villain stood before him—the footlights of publicity were flaring in the float—a gallery of people were regarding, ready to come in with the applause. So, Harry promptly knocked the waiter down.

This noble feat of prowess took the hearts of the assembled audience by storm, and it

was greeted with a salvo of applause. Every one insisted upon drinking with him; and he walked home with Miss Simmons, if unsteadily, with quite an air of chivalry. Miss Simmons thought he was the noblest of mankind; and Harry went to bed that morning with that sense of satisfaction which attends successful folly.

The waiter summoned Harry for assaulting him.

This prosaic and undignified proceeding set every one against him. It was so un-English. But the case came on, and there was a full bench of magistrates; for it had been the great sensation of the current year in Cornfield. I need hardly say that every magistrate upon the bench had talked the matter over across his own dinner-table, and had quite made up his mind what he was going to do. This preliminary being

satisfactorily settled, they all sat in solemn form to hear the evidence.

The court was crowded. Even the Miss Greys had managed to prevail upon papa to take them. Edith was not at all jealous of Miss Simmons, for she was a girl of sense ; and her grey eyes shone radiantly on Harry, as he sat beneath the dock. Of course, not in it : docks are not for gentlemen : they are for miserable creatures who, without a happiness or hope in this desolate life, have unsuccessfully endeavoured to get out of it, and other such atrocious criminals.

There were other ladies there ; and more than one opera-glass was superciliously levelled at Miss Simmons ; many a pair of bright eyes beamed on Harry. Mr. Grey, who was a magistrate, was on the bench ; and although Mr. Bonamy was not a

magistrate, still, being a gentleman of recognised position and a near relation of the prisoner at the bar, he also was accommodated with a seat amongst the judges. Need I add that Harry Bonamy was personally known to every magistrate upon the bench, and was about to dine with one of them that evening?

And yet, when all was over, that abandoned and un-English waiter—who was made to stand behind a barrier, on the prosecutor's side, in company with several policemen—had the impudence to say that it had not been a fair trial. As if in England and the nineteenth century, before a bench of unpaid magistrates, there ever was such a thing as an unfair trial!

When Ernest heard of it, he thought that Mr. Bonamy might just have given him the brief for the defence; but it never

seems to occur even to the kindest-hearted people in the world, that a barrister just called, whom they know personally, should be able to conduct the simplest case. So, Harry's brief was given to a dull old gentleman of fifty-five, who made a dreadful hash of it, but who was listened to with great attention by the bench ; whilst the un-English waiter was told not to interrupt the court, and ultimately given over to be kept in order by the superintendant of police.

Having heard the evidence, the bench said they had come to the conclusion that the summons ought to be dismissed. No doubt, an assault had been committed, and the law had been broken ; and perhaps, technically speaking, the correct course was to inflict a nominal penalty ; but they had decided that it would be more judicious to

regard the matter in its broader aspects. If the defendant had stabbed the prosecutor with a knife, or struck him from behind in a dark lane, they would have taken a more serious view of the affair. But Mr. Bonamy had not done this. He had only used what a learned judge had aptly described as "the Englishman's weapon"—the fist. And he had very serious provocation. The young woman who was with him—whom they had no reason to suppose was not perfectly respectable: but who had better keep out of such places in the future—had been most wantonly insulted by the prosecutor; and they could not shut their eyes to the fact that Mr. Bonamy had only acted in the way in which every high-spirited young Englishman would act under such circumstances. The summons would therefore be dismissed with costs.

"Seventeen and sixpence," said the superintendent to the waiter. "Come, look sharp."

"I haven't got it," said the waiter.

"Then, you'll go to prison." And he was hustled off, to discuss the matter with the clerk in an adjoining room.

"Is the landlord of the Green Dragon present?" asked the chairman.

"Yes, your worship," cried that person, coming forward.

"We think it would be well, sir," said the chairman, with severity—"we think it would be well, in view of the approaching Brewster Sessions"—the poor landlord trembled—"if you did not keep in the capacity of barmaids at your house young women who frequent such places as the Star."

"She shall be discharged to-day, your worships," said the landlord.

“We need hardly say,” resumed the chairman, “that Mr. Bonamy goes out of court without the slightest stain upon his character.”

“Some of us think, with credit,” added one of the other magistrates.

The dull old gentleman, who had done all he could to convict his client, was complimented on his conduct of the case ; old Mr. Bonamy was heartily congratulated ; and Harry drove off in the carriage of the magistrate with whom he was to dine.

And thus the trial ended. The un-English waiter had to pay the costs ; the landlord got into worse odour than before ; and Lizzie Simmons lost her situation. She is often at the Star now.

CHAPTER XII.

IN LOVE.

“ His heart taketh not rest in the night.”—*Ecclesiastes*.

It is marvellous the hold that prejudices have upon us. Those ideas and sympathies in which we have been born and bred, but on which we have never bestowed a thought, and for which we could not give the shadow of a reason, saturate us through and through, and grow into our very beings. All the sacredness of long association, all the tenderness of memory, and all the halo of affection gather round them, till they

seem to be something holy, which to question is unworthy, and to abandon is base; and all the time they may be nothing more than prodigies of folly and injustice.

But we cannot think it possible. The moss of ages has grown round them, and they wear a reverend air. How can the universal judgment of mankind be wrong? How can we doubt or question the sufficiency of what has satisfied so many great and holy men? Is it to be thought that they are wrong, and these poor, little, unknown sceptics right? It is impossible.

But we forget that all the great discoverers of truth have once been poor, and little, and unknown—odd men against the wide, wide world, the judgments of its greatest ones, the faith of ages, and the universal verdict of mankind. We forget that great men are but great in their espe-

cial sphere, and out of it as often as not accept the current doctrines. We forget that even great men in their own sphere may be wrong. We forget that the universal judgment of mankind is nothing but a phrase, that mankind is not capable of forming an opinion, that the judgment of mankind means nothing but the judgment of its leading members, and that folly is inherited as well as wisdom and as surely travels through the generations. We forget that the moss of ages grows on everything, and makes the slopstone look as venerable as the altar.

But these ancient customs and beliefs so wrap us round, so bind us one to another, are so inextricably interwoven with our interests and affections, that we cannot bear the thought of doubting them. No man who is surrounded by the multif-

rious associations of this life, who fills a recognized position in society, whose bread depends upon adherence to established customs, who has wife and children to support, whose reputation hangs upon his faithfulness to other men's opinions, and whose disagreement with them means the misery of those he loves, is capable of forming an opinion that is worth the name.

And who is altogether independent of these influences? who is altogether senseless to the reproach and desertion of his friends? who but the very greatest of mankind can brush these things aside, and think and act as if they were not? It is given to few men to be able to bear the exultation of their enemies and the despair of their friends, the wretchedness of those whom they love and the reproach of those

whom they respect, and to walk out alone into the desert of truth with the brand of infamy upon them. Yet some must. The grandest crown in human history was a crown of thorns.

But Ernest was as free from these impediments to independent judgment as a man can ever be. He had no wife, he had no children, he had no position, and he lived alone.

He lived alone. And how much does that mean? The solitude of the recluse produces only morbid fantasies; the solitude of the outlaw tends to bitter and distorted views; but the solitude of him who mixes with the world, yet lives alone, is the condition which of all conditions is most favourable to sound judgment. It is impossible to think in a crowd, and "a dream comes through the multitude of business."

It is when he is alone that a man sees things in their true proportions, and is able to consider them with an unbiassed mind. It is when he is alone that a man lives his individual life. In the bustle of business and the confusion of society, he lives the life of others and of the world. To live his own, he must be by himself. There are thoughts and feelings in the breast of every thinking man and woman, in which not the dearest friend or the most intimate companion can share. In all great thoughts and deep emotions man must be alone.

In deepest truth, we always are alone. The very friends who are our greatest comfort and support, may in an instant be our foes. The man who is our warmest advocate at noon, may ere the set of sun be our denouncer. The companion of our solitude—the confidant of our most sacred

thoughts and feelings, which admit of confidence—the sharer of our difficulties and oppressions—our last refuge and our last belief—may turn upon us in a moment, and go over to our enemies. The woman who is lying in our arms to-night, may strike a dagger in our heart to-morrow.

Ernest wrestled with his prejudices, and came to ask himself the reason for them, and he found none. And if he could not solve the doubts and difficulties which oppressed him, he at least began to hold the thoughts and feelings which he had inherited with lighter grasp ; and felt that it was possible they might be wrong—which is a great step forward.

I should be ashamed to mention the amount of tobacco which these doubts and difficulties cost him. His pipe coloured rapidly.

I wonder how men live, who do not smoke. Have they no thoughts? Is existence quite a simple matter to them, and life a perfectly plain, straightforward business? And if it is not, how can they sit still and contemplate the dreadful mischief which is going on around them? How can they keep sane?

It was as much as Ernest could do to hold his own against the perplexities which beset him, even with the aid of that most blessed of all plants which some have the audacity to call a weed. And even when he went to bed and sought escape in sleep, they followed him and made themselves his bedfellows; and he could hear St. Clement Danes strike one, and two, and three, and call out "oranges and lemons" in the pitifullest way; and all the little tinklers in the neighbourhood chimed in doleful chorus;

till St. Paul's struck in with deeper sorrow, and Big Ben sent forth his solemn boom.

Those London clocks and bells are the only inanimate things which seem to sympathize with humankind. From their commanding station, their huge yellow eyes, so melancholy and so patient, gaze into the night, and watch the evil which is done under the stars; and their great hearts throb heavily; and every hour, when they can bear no longer, they lift up their solemn voices, and send their sympathising message down below—as if to say, “Well, well—another hour has gone—it will be over soon.”

And in the daytime, he looked out into the square, and watched the fountain dripping everlastingly. And then he watched the clerks who poured into old Blenkinsop's in one continuous stream, and wondered

whether Blenkinsop had ever felt like this. Immersed in declarations, pleas, and replications, interrogatories, claims, and answers, what anxiety to Blenkinsop was life? What time had he to mourn the wrongs of nature and the tyranny of man? He made a profit out of them, and never cracked his teeth against the problems of existence. Ernest did him wrong. Old Blenkinsop had been young, too: he, too, had had his disillusion; his days had in their time been sorrows, "and his travail grief." He had been penniless and briefless, when a little money would have bought him a great happiness; and it was only when the happiness had passed beyond the reach of gold, and other arms were round her, that the gold had come. He, too, had gazed upon the dripping fountain, and had listened to St. Clement Danes. But Ernest never dreamt

a heart had beat beneath that snuffy frill ; and thought that his experience was peculiar — when a hundred other hearts, within a stone's throw of him, were as heavy with it as his own.

Oh, you attorneys—who let young men rust, and work old men to death—a guinea brief would have made all the difference ; and altered the complexion of the heavens.

He wandered down into the club ; and as he looked upon the grizzly faces there, immersed in book, and magazine, and newspaper, or puffing solemn pipes in quiet corners, or exchanging jokes and sarcasms across the glasses and the pewters, wondered whether they had ever felt like him. Ay, every one of them. But they had lived it down ; although it had left ugly marks on some of them, and stranded nearly all in barren cynicism.

To read those books, and magazines, and newspapers, you would imagine that the world appeared in rosy colours to the writers of them : but come to know them—come to interchange with them the real views which lie concealed beneath men's table-talk—and you will come across whole planes of thought the printer does not set in type, and sentiments it would not pay to publish.

There was Cooke, as usual. No, not as usual : for he had got a young man with him, whom Ernest had not seen before.

"I don't know any one more likely," Mr. Cooke was saying, as Ernest passed the pair. And then the youth said something Ernest could not hear.

"Oh, certainly," replied the manager, "and if I liked it, put it on the stage at once."

"I'm very much obliged to you," ob-

served the young man—"very much indeed."

"Don't mention it," said Cooke. "No trouble at all." And soon the young man went, with kindled eyes.

It was the old game. Cooke had caught another fly ; and having netted him, composed himself to slumber.

Just then, Mr. Liverpool caught sight of Ernest—for whom, as well as everybody else, he always had a glance of recognition ; and bustling up to him, insisted on a drink.

In Ernest's mood, just then, there were few men whose company would not have been a discord ; but Mr. Liverpool was one of those who, by their breadth of sympathy, are never out of place. He was always appropriate to the occasion, whether it was serious or social : equally at home with men and women, old and young. He was a peg

which could be round or square, triangular or oval, just according to the hole in which it found itself.

And Ernest felt quite cheerful, in a moment.

He confided to Mr. Liverpool the incident of Mr. Cooke and the young man, and told him of his own experience.

"Ah, yes," said he, "that's Cooke all over. I don't know who the young man was, but it is pretty clear he was a stranger and was being taken in. But I say, Mr. Tempest, you don't mean to say you've taken to play-writing?" he inquired.

"Well, only to a small extent," said Ernest.

"I'm afraid you've put a rod in pickle for yourself," continued Mr. Liverpool—who was as well acquainted with things theatrical as he was with things literary, things

artistic, things in general, or any other things —“ However, if a man’s made up his mind to write plays, why, write plays he will. But you take my advice——”

“ I will,” assented Ernest.

“ Leave the managers alone.”

“ But who am I to go to, then ?”

“ The fact’s just this : managers profess to read plays, and don’t ; actors don’t profess to read plays, and do. Managers pretend that they have all the power, and have a little ; actors pretend that they have none at all, and have a great deal.”

“ You recommend me to apply to them ?”

“ Nay, I don’t recommend you to apply to anybody. But if you are bent upon it, you’ll find actors—till they get too great and busy to attend to you—are the kindest, most obliging, and long-suffering of fellows. They’re not business-like, you know. They

can't bear writing letters, and it's ten to one they'll lose your address ; but you get at them personally, and they'll help you all they can. If you want introducing, come to me. Of course," wound up the little man, behind his hand, and nudging Ernest with his elbow, "they'll expect to have the best part. Human nature, you know, human nature. Well, I must be off."

For Mr. Liverpool was always in a hurry, and never sat ten minutes in one seat; and so he bustled off to have a cheery word with half-a-dozen other people on his way to the club-door ; behind which, with a general nod which seemed to take in everybody and yet to be directed at each personally, he disappeared, and left our hero ever so much happier.

So much can a bright look and a kindly word do towards the general happiness, it

is unfortunate so many of us are obliged by nature to wear gloomy faces and to hold our tongues, or else to smile a smile of ghastliness and be as playful as a hippopotamus.

When Ernest reached his chambers, he found George Drummond waiting for him on the landing.

"Oh, here you are at last," said George ;
"I thought you'd never come."

"Why, what's the matter?"

"Have you seen anything of Rosamond?"

"No, nothing."

"Then come and help me look for her.
Read that."

And Drummond put in Ernest's hand a note in Rosamond's handwriting, which was like all other women's handwriting, but sent a thrill through Ernest's heart no other would have done. But when he

read the note, a thrill of quite another sort went through him—a thrill of terror and dismay.

The note ran thus :

“DEAR GEORGE,—I find that I am wholly unprovided for, and illegitimate. I will be a burden upon nobody—not even upon you. Of course, you must abhor me. Think no more of—ROSAMOND.”

“I found that letter waiting for me when I called at Kensington about an hour ago. The servant told me Rosamond went out this morning early, and said she didn’t know what time she should be back. I have done all I could to trace her. She had been to several shops, and paid some small accounts, and I discovered she had gone by railway from Queen’s Road, but where I could not ascertain.”

"Perhaps she has returned by this," said Ernest ; but a chill struck through him when he remembered that her last words to him had been "good-bye," not "good-afternoon." He had not noticed at the time, but he remembered now.

"Let's go and see," returned the surgeon, and they went.

But Rosamond had not returned, and never did.

They sought her high and low ; they hunted her all through the dreadful night ; but it was no use. Rosamond had fled, and left no trace behind her. The curse of our unhappy laws had fallen on a helpless girl, and driven her mad.

Dead beaten and dejected, they gave up the search ; but though so wearied out with physical exertion and with mental fright that he could hardly drag himself upstairs,

sleep would not rescue Ernest from his agonies.

For they *were* agonies. His brain was in a blaze. What might not happen to her? What might she not do? In that distracted hour which intervened before the dawn of day, his heart revealed to him for the first time the fact—that he loved Rosamond.

With daybreak they began the search again. They searched for her by day and night, but all with no avail. The little family who had been so united three short months before, were scattered to the winds. Two members of it little heaps of dust, and one a fugitive. And Ernest was in love.

Thus ended the first epoch in that passage of his life which I am striving to portray, for love begins another epoch always;

either one of the profoundest peace and happiness, or one of the profoundest grief and pain. Life's greatest blessing or life's greatest curse. Which, rests with destiny. It seems the blindest chance.

And thus we close this book.

The life I am describing is the life of one who has got everything a man can want according to the world—health, strength, culture, a profession, and a competence—and yet it is a melancholy life. For youth is not the heyday it is represented—if it thinks. The world has never yet been just to thoughtful youth. The fools are always happy; but the life of men of brains, though it may lead through sunshine to a goal of rest, begins in cloud and storm.

END OF BOOK THE SECOND.

BOOK THE THIRD.

CHAPTER I.

DISGUST.

“Therefore I hated life.”—*Ecclesiastes*.

FOR more than twelve months since we closed the last book, has the sun been shining on the river ; but the river is still streaming on. It is the depth of winter, both in the season of the year and Ernest's heart. The fountain is still dripping in the Temple garden, and St. Clement Danes is singing “oranges and lemons” in the Strand. The tall quaint chambers of the Templars bear a load of snow, and Blenkinsop is busy as a bee.

Still, Ernest has not held a brief. He has attended chambers almost every day, and seldom missed a sessions ; but with no avail. He has seen many of his juniors getting gradually into work—some of them, men whom he had known at college ; and had often wondered what the secret was. He knew it was not talents, for they had none. And he found it was connections. He had none. But he was not particularly sorry ; for he had no great ambition to get business at the bar. The life of even a successful barrister appeared to him a very poor affair. At first, a weary waiting, until hope is gone, and interest is dead, and most of the desires of youth have vanished beyond reach in the dull past ; then, ceaseless toil, and not a moment's interval to live in ; last of all—if you are very lucky—a brilliant reputation in the law reports,

and the splendid obscurity of the woolsack. But although he had no great ambition to succeed, he had a desolate sense that the years were slipping away over his head, and that he was making no way in the world.

This, however, was the least of all his troubles. The greatest was to find that the world is not worth making way in ; and that success in it, far from being a proof of merit, is rather the reverse. Ambition would, indeed, be noble—it would, indeed, be glorious to succeed—if success were the criterion of merit : if the race was always to the swift, and the battle always to the strong ; if the bread was to the wise, the riches to the men of understanding, and the favour to the men of skill. But he saw too clearly, not only that time and chance happened to them all ; but that the bread was to the foolish, precisely because they were

foolish ; the riches to the unscrupulous, because they were unscrupulous ; and the favour to the vulgar, because they were vulgar. His disillusion was about complete. He saw that, in his own profession, it was not ability that was successful ; but ability that got the chance of showing its existence, and incompetence that married an attorney's daughter. He saw that, in the church, it was not holiness that got the bishopric, and that fidelity to conscience lost its living. He saw that, in literature, it was not the thoughtful whose books sold, but theirs who held the popular opinions. He saw that, on the stage, it was not the conscientious artist who was most successful, but the brazen harlot and the vulgar clown. He saw that, in commerce, it was the rogue and speculator who reaped all the profit ; and that the honest tradesman could not

make his living. He saw that it was the impostor who succeeded in society. He saw that fools were happy, and the wise were wretched. Finally, he saw that chance had more to do with fate than any qualities.

We try to impose upon youth by telling it that there is no such thing as chance. We have a whole department of literature exclusively devoted to the inculcation of the creed that merit always conquers in the end. I wonder that the lie does not stick in our throats. All life is chance. Our coming into it—our going out of it—our lot in it. It is all chance.

And then, he was in love. And love—which parents make so light of—which is looked upon as such a youthful folly—which is regarded as an idle trifling by the side of the realities of life—of which no account is

taken in our social ordinances and arrangements—which is more oppressed and outraged than aught else in life—is life itself. When love exists, it is the only thing in life : all else is nothing.

It is marvellous, this folly of the world. It is awful, this wickedness of parents : exalting their own paltry plans and puerile ambitions above their children's happiness. What is love, compared with position, reputation, or success in life ? An idle fancy, that a man will soon get over ? It is the one thing no man ever yet got over. Without it, there is no such thing as success in life : life has no success. The life of him whose love goes wrong—be he prime minister, archbishop, or lord chancellor—is nothing but a dismal failure.

And Ernest's had gone wrong.

When—thanks to parents and the world

—does not true love go wrong? They were both guilty here. That grandfather of Rosamond—who was now dust and ashes in his grave, but whose bequest of evil will go broadening out for ever and for ever through the ages—and this miserable world, had both conspired to ruin Rosamond, and snatch her out of Ernest's reach until it was too late.

When one considers all the wretched girls now lying by the side of husbands whom they do not love; and all the men and women who are dragging out half-hearted, maimed, and broken lives beneath the stolid hills and laughing skies—it becomes a solemn question whether this parental love is not as great a curse as blessing.

Ernest had no interest in life. And still, he had to go on living. Still, he had to get

up every morning, and to shave and dress himself; and to come down and have his breakfast, and to sit and watch the fountain, and to listen to the chime of old St. Clement's; and to go and get his dinner, and to come back to his chambers; and to sit and watch the fountain, and to listen to the chime of old St. Clement's; and to go to bed, and—when he could—to sleep.

This is a weird life—a strange conglomeration of grandeur and littleness, of things awful and things ludicrous; but is there in it any mockery more ghastly, than for a man whose interests, ambitions, and desires are dead within him, to have to look after the buttons on his shirt?

These paltry things, with which life seems to mock us, irritated Ernest. Often he would go without his breakfast, sooner than descend to spread the butter on the bread.

He was ambitious, once, of fame. He had experienced the usual wild dreams which dance grotesquely through the brains of youth. But this had gone now. He had seen that there is no greater vanity under the sun than labouring for fame. Fame only comes (supposing that it comes at all) when we have ceased to care for it—at least, with the wild longing. It is fame in youth which is so pleasant to conceive of: and fame seldom comes to youth. If we analyse it, we shall find that the desire of fame is the desire to distinguish ourselves amongst the friends, companions, and associates of our youth; the longing to be able to obtain through it the objects of our youthful admiration and ambition. What is distinction amongst strangers? What is fame in middle life? A theatre in the day-time! A lantern without light! And

when it comes, those friends, companions, and associates are dead, divided from us, scattered and estranged; those objects, swallowed in the dreadful past. Then, what is fame worth? Ernest felt that this also was vanity.

But still, he persevered in his literary pursuits: though more from habit and that inability to help it which is born in the true author, than with any purpose. He could get his articles accepted now; but the novelty had worn off seeing himself in print, and the rewards were small. He positively shuddered, when he looked into the yawning gulf of journalism—of literature which is here to-day and gone to-morrow—and thought of all the brilliant wits and gallant pens which it had swallowed up; and which now lie entombed within its black abyss, without the humblest

tablet in the hearts of men. He never walked down Fleet Street, when St. Clement's chimed at midnight, and listened to those panting presses, but he shuddered. Journalism is ambition's grave.

He still continued his dramatic writing. I can't say how many dramas, comedies, and farces, which he had produced in all those agonies of composition which can only be likened to the throes of childbirth—had been lost, mislaid, returned, maltreated—anything but read—by the enlightened managers of London.

At last, he had struck oil—or thought he had. A comedy of his had actually been read, and by return of post accepted—for when a thing is done at all, in the dramatic world, it is done quickly : if you have to wait, abandon hope—at a good London theatre. It was in a lady's hands

—not a lord's doll, whose management consists in murdering all the leading parts, and nothing more — but an industrious, energetic, enterprising lady, whose own capital was staked on her adventure. She had only one fault: which was not her own so much as her profession's: and that was, an utter absence of the sense of an arrangement meaning anything, or of a promise being made for any other end than to be broken.

She was hard put to it for a piece, you may be sure, when she read Ernest's. As she said to him herself, on one occasion—as a rule, she had no time to waste in reading pieces. But she had just had a failure, and she wasn't one of those Miss-managers who make a failure run a hundred nights. One man's disappointment is another man's hope; and now came Ernest's chance. Her

next piece wasn't written. It was ordered; but the distracted gentleman who took the order had eleven other pieces on the stocks, and couldn't "knock it off," as he expressed it, under six weeks. Ernest's chanced—it was the merest chance—to be the first piece, out of some two hundred which she had about her table, that she read. It was the last, as well. There were a dozen better ones, which had been waiting ever so much longer; lying in obscurity within an arm's length of her chair; which might as well have been sent by the letter post (and registered) addressed to the Great Desert of Sahara, if the senders had but known it. In more than one of them there was a little fortune. No one gathered it, and no one ever will. Their authors are too wearied out to send for them. She "couldn't be bothered" reading any more.

“This one’ll do,” she thought, to fill up for six weeks, when Tinker’s work of art would be completed. So she wrote off, there and then, accepting it. And thus the matter stood.

But Ernest was not much excited. Rosamond was gone—he knew not where. What did it matter, now? What did anything matter? He had everything, except the only thing he wanted; but what is life without it?

He has learnt many things since last we saw him. He has learnt to hold opinions lightly. He has learnt that no man knows the truth; and that we all should keep our minds wide open, and hold no fixed creed, and shut our ears to nothing, lest we shut them against truth. But he has not learnt—shall we ever learn?—that we must hold even our loves lightly. For our dearest

friends may leave us—whom we have most cherished, may turn round and rend us. This dreadful world which whirls about us—this tremendous time which sweeps us onwards—have we know not what in store. She whom we love, and think is with us—part of us in mind and soul—may be torn from us, change her sympathies, and leave us all alone.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. CLARKE.

"Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay."—*Ecclesiastes*.

THE familiar step is heard again upon the staircase; the familiar knock is rapped against the door; and the familiar voice is in the room, exclaiming, "Well, old fellow, how are we this morning?" It is the doctor.

Quite the old George Drummond—bright and genial.

The grief of death is nothing to the grief

of life. The misery of death we can surmount; but the misery of life is insurmountable. The surgeon had sustained what every one would call the greater grief; and yet he was the happier of the two. For his disaster was a definite, unalterable fact; whilst Ernest's was a horrible uncertainty and vague suspense. The difference in their dispositions must, of course, be also taken into the account. George Drummond's was essentially a cheerful disposition—which no opinions, however gloomy—no knowledge, however sad—no grief, however great—could altogether conquer. In those fits of melancholy which sometimes oppress us all—for every one of us has some great sorrow somewhere in the past, which now and then comes surging up into the present—he almost loathed himself for ever being happy. This blessed

recuperative energy of nature, which will not permit us to be always miserable, is itself a dreadful thing to contemplate. One of sorrow's subtlest sorrows is the knowledge that it will not last ; and that the day will come when we shall once again be happy, without the dead.

"I'm just about as usual."

"Briefless," said the surgeon : "but not pipeless, or my nose deceives me."

"No, thank goodness," exclaimed Ernest. "Life wouldn't be worth living, if it wasn't for tobacco."

"In the downs, eh?" said the surgeon. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing new. Of course, you haven't heard of Rosamond?"

"No, not a word."

"Her money must be done by this time."

“Long since.”

“What becomes of all that money that was settled upon Mrs. Vane?”

“Old Furnival’s walked off with it. I met him in the street, the other day ; and asked him what he’d done with it.”

“And what did he say?”

“Well, he rather amused me,” — and George Drummond laughed : for he could laugh now — “the old boy was so lugubrious over it. He said he had been taking counsel’s opinion as to what he ought to do with it. I believe the old wretch positively thought he had a right to it himself.”

“I hope that counsel disabused him of that notion.”

“Very much so. He went to a man called — let me see now, what was his name?”

“Blenkinsop,” suggested Ernest, cynically.

“Yes, that was the name—Blenkinsop.”

And Ernest laughed : for he could laugh, too—in a way. Old Blenkinsop, who in his youth had starved, appeared to be considered now the only person at the bar : and a new generation of Blenkinsops were starving.

“Well, what did he say ?”

“He told him he was a trustee, and had better be careful what he was doing—that he hadn’t the least right to take the money—and that if he did, it would be such a breach of trust as would involve him in all sorts of pains and penalties.”

“Bravo, old Blenkinsop !” cried Ernest.

“And that his proper course was either to apply to the Court of Chancery for instructions, or else pay the money over to

the father, who was the residuary legatee of all the settlor's property."

"And what's he going to do?"

"He's not made up his mind."

"Do you think he knows the father?"

"Must do."

"But he didn't tell you who he was."

"Not he. It was as much as I could do to get what I have told you out of him. It took me half-an-hour!"

"I wonder if the father is alive."

"Well, Furnival was hinting that he doubted it; and that he had no means of finding him out if he was."

"But that may only be his foxing."

"I believe it was."

"Rat-tat," was heard upon the knocker on the basement, then a louder "rat-tat" on the floor beneath them, then a brisk step on the staircase, and quite a startling "rat-

tat" upon Ernest's door, a little rattle at the aperture—and flop, there fell a letter on the floor.

"A letter, positively! And from Mrs. Clarke, the manageress."

It ran thus:—

"DEAR MR. TEMPEST,—

"I am going to put your piece at once into rehearsal. Please come round to the stage, to-night, at half-past nine. I want to see you about the cuts.

"In haste, yours truly,

"CHARLOTTE CLARKE."

"Ernest, I congratulate you," said the doctor, as he took his leave. "You've managed it, at last."

And Ernest thought so, too; and felt a little happy. He did not much like that line about "the cuts." What cuts? It

was the first time anything had been said about cuts. He hoped the piece was not going to be mauled. However, it was satisfactory that he was to be seen about the mauling.

Innocent Ernest ! What did Mrs. Clarke care for consulting him ? She thought herself quite competent to cut up Sheridan and Shakespere, without their assistance. They might have talents ; but it was her "knowledge of the stage" that made her so superior. It was not the cuts about which she desired to have an interview with Ernest. That was only her way of putting it. It was "the terms."

At half-past nine, precisely, Ernest was at the stage-door.

"Can I see Mrs. Clarke, please ?" he inquired of the attendant Cerberus.

The man eyed him suspiciously.

"What do you want with her?" at last he grunted.

"She asked me to come round and see her—about a piece of mine," said Ernest, nervously.

The man regarded him from head to foot, with an expression which said—quite as plain as words could—"It's a lie. You know it is a lie. She doesn't want to see you. You want to see her. That's it."

"Will you kindly send my card in?"

"I can't leave the door. As soon as anybody's passing through, I'll send it."

And so Ernest had to wait, and take stock of the dingy portal through which so much loveliness was passing every night; and of the door-keeper, who was a study in himself.

I wonder where stage door-keepers are picked up. They are quite a genus. The

only incorruptible man I ever met was a stage door-keeper ; but I am afraid his purity arose from natural moroseness of disposition, rather than from any lofty principle.

At last, a scene-shifter turned in from an adjacent public-house, and was entrusted with our hero's card.

In half a minute came a damsel from within, all smiles and courtesy—in striking contrast to the janitor ; for she belonged to the other side of the magic barrier.

“ Would Mr. Tempest please to step this way ? Mrs. Clarke was on the stage, but would be off directly.”

Ernest followed her through a dim labyrinth of passages, all strewn with planks and canvas, blocks and ropes.

“ Not that way,” said the damsel, seizing hold of Ernest's coat, only just in time to

prevent him making his first appearance before the British public. "This way."

And she led him in what seemed to him the very way he had been going, but which just made all the difference between going before the audience and not. The damsel stuck fast hold of him. She saw he was not to be trusted by himself. And they went groping down the narrowest little lane between a huge blank wall and an enormous sheet of canvas, which stretched right across the building. It was the back cloth—for a heavy set was on, which took up the whole stage; and they were crossing it. Then, suddenly, they came into a blaze of light, and there came surging into Ernest's ears a low, hoarse murmur, like a distant sea.

"What's that?" said he.

"What's what?" inquired the damsel.

“That noise?”

“Oh, that’s the audience. This act is going very well to-night.”

He passed several rows of flaring gas-jets, stretching perpendicularly up into a network of long wooden galleries and rollers, ropes and pulleys—where they joined long rows of horizontal jets, which reached across the stage above the top of the proscenium, until they joined the perpendicular rows on the other side. In front of him, but to his right, he recognised the footlights—the first familiar objects he had seen; though even they had an inverted look, for he was looking at the front of them. And peering just above them, in the dimness of the front, he could discern the head of the conductor of the orchestra: for Mrs. Clarke had not adopted the abominable innovation of entombing him beneath the stage. Immedi-

ately before him was a gentleman in a sort of little box, surrounded by all kinds of handles, taps, and signalling appliances. It was the prompter. People think the prompter's only duty is to prompt. It is about the least of all his duties. He is almost as necessary on the last night of a piece as on the first. The gentleman was in a violent perspiration, pulling at all sorts of bells and working at all sorts of handles—regulating the daylight turning on the sunshine, and signalling to the moon up in the flies that it was time to be getting ready.

All at once, the flaring gas-jets lowered with one accord, and a delicious moonlight threw soft shadows on the boards. Then, at another signal from the prompter, half-a-dozen scene-shifters in paper caps ran half a flat from each side of the stage, until they

met together in the middle with a bang—a barbarous but useful expedient, which makes a long crack down the middle of the scene. Up went the lights again, and a tornado of applause told Ernest that the set was over and the carpenter's scene on.

Some ladies of the ballet who had been in the set scene, came trooping past him, brushing him with their distended skirts and looking at him curiously with blackened eyes. They saw at once he was a stranger; for a novice behind the scenes is as unmistakable as a landsman on the sea or a sailor upon shore. One of the young ladies giggled at him, and seemed to expect him to speak to her, which rather disconcerted him.

“Now then, my little dears, look sharp. Quick change, you know,” exclaimed a bustling gentleman who came up at the

moment. And his little dears trooped on-wards towards the dressing-rooms ; for he was the stage-manager.

“ Mrs. Clarke is in this scene, sir,” he remarked to Ernest. “ Will you wait here, or will you go into her room ? ”

Ernest preferred to stay where he was ; so he stood and watched the actors from the side.

It is a curious experience to watch a play being acted from the wing—at least, for the first time. There is such an unreality and incongruity about it. The scene itself seems so mixed up with bits of other scenes which lie about it, and the actors on the stage with the carpenters and people in plain clothes who stand around. You keep forgetting there is any audience at all, until you are reminded of it by that hoarse, mysterious murmur which keeps surging up.

And then to hear the actors speak their final lines upon the stage, and suddenly rush off it almost into your embrace, and hear them talking in their proper persons—has a strange effect.

“Farewell, my child!” exclaimed a venerable man with long white hair, while Ernest listened. “You have made your choice. But yet the day will come when you will bitterly remember your poor father’s warning— Damn that baby! There’s a squalling baby in the very middle
• of the pit. It’s too bad. Spoilt my best scene. All to ribbons!”

“It’s very much too bad,” concurred the low comedian, who had been put on for a serious part in some emergency. “It quite ruined my pathetic speech. You know I’m always rather shaky in my pathos, and a little thing upsets me.”

“You’re a couple of old brutes,” exclaimed Mrs. Clarke’s leading lady—a charming creature, who was to be Ernest’s heroine, and who had just come off the stage with heaving breast and sparkling eyes amidst a perfect hurricane of plaudits, and was in the best of humours. “Bless its little heart, it only wants the bottle.”

“The bottle!” cried the low comedian, contemptuously.

“Yes; I’d like to know what *you* would do without the bottle,” returned the leading lady, with a wink at Ernest which as much as said, “I see you’re listening. What do you think of that?”

Now Ernest wasn’t used to being winked at by a leading lady, and he was afraid he was mistaken in her character; but he was quite wrong. She was perfectly respectable, but she had been accustomed all her

life to the Arcadian simplicity of "behind the scenes."

At this point the prompter got into a fever of excitement, and appeared to be frantically working at every handle he could reach. "Ting" went a bell—down dropped the lights—and a dull thud, close to him, made the boards shake under Ernest's feet. It was the roller of the act-drop ; for the act was over, and the house was in an uproar of delight. Miss Vavasour again made her appearance, and was led before the curtain to be greeted with a storm of approbation : and when she had again emerged, and swept past Ernest on her way to change her dress, she said to him, " Now, wasn't that nice ?" in such a tone of innocent delight that he felt quite ashamed of having doubted her, and was her warm admirer from that moment.

And now ensued a scene of wild confusion. The place which half a second since had been so orderly and tranquil, was a perfect Babel. An army of scene-shifters sprang up suddenly from nowhere, and began to rush about the stage with fragments of scenery and articles of furniture. Inextricably mixed together, all over the place, were carpenters and actors, gas-men, actresses, scene-shifters and ballet-girls — everybody rushing wildly up and down, and all the women laughing, chattering, and joking. In the comparative quiet of a remote corner the heavy villain was dancing a spring-waltz with the second lady, who was humming the accompaniment; whilst half-a-dozen ballet-girls, who were ready dressed for the next act, were having a boisterous game of “puss-in-the-corner,” until the affectionate stage-manager

caught sight of them, and chased the "little dears" into their dressing-room.

In the middle of this wild confusion came the smiling damsel—who was Mrs. Clarke's personal attendant—to say Mrs. Clarke would see our hero in her room. Again he followed her, and only ran against three carpenters and tumbled over only two young ladies—who appeared to rather like it—on the way. Down another narrow passage, lighted by a single gas-jet, down one flight of stairs, and he was in the room. She was standing up before a looking-glass, with a powder-puff in one hand and the other busy with her hair. A handsome, buxom woman, of some forty years.

"Ha, Mr. Tempest! Very glad to see you. Take a chair. Polly, lace my dress. Have you been in front?"

"No, Mrs. Clarke. I have been stand-

ing at the wing. The piece seems to be going very well."

"Oh, it goes well enough," said Mrs. Clarke, dabbing her face over with the powder-puff. "But there's no money in it. You'll excuse me going on with my toilet, as I'm in the second scene."

"Oh, certainly."

"I like your piece amazingly—most charming play—so bright and so full of incident," continued Mrs. Clarke between the dabs. "I never was more taken with a piece. A little tighter, Polly. It will be a great success."

Ernest began to think that he had made his fortune.

"But first about terms, Mr. Tempest. I suppose for a first piece you'll be content with fifty pounds."

Ernest thought his fortune wasn't quite

made yet ; but he was far too glad to get his piece performed to stickle about terms. So he professed that he should be quite satisfied with fifty pounds.

"This man's a fool," thought Mrs. Clarke. She was prepared to give two hundred, and was paying Tinker for the work of art five hundred and a royalty. But of course she didn't say so.

"I have had to alter it a good deal. Tighter still, please, Polly."

Ernest's heart sank. So the alterations had been made.

"I've cut out the third act."

His heart jumped up into his throat.

"But then the fourth won't follow on the second," he gasped out.

"I've made it," exclaimed Mrs. Clarke, triumphantly. "I'm half a dramatist myself. Should you like to see it?"

"Very much," said Ernest.

"Look there, then," and she held up the manuscript.

When Ernest took it in his hands, he found that at the end of act the second Mrs. Clarke had written, "A month elapses." That was all. And that was her idea of being half a dramatist.

"The piece has been well cast. Miss Vavasour will play the heroine. The scenery is being painted. It will be advertised to-morrow ; and I shall be glad to see you at the first rehearsal, which will be at twelve o'clock the day after to-morrow ;" and with a bright smile, Mrs. Clarke held out her hand, as intimating that the interview had terminated. She had settled the momentous question of "terms," much to her satisfaction, and that was all she cared about.

So Ernest shook her soft plump hand, and was escorted by the smiling damsel to the stage-door. The door-keeper scowled him out, as much as to say, "Don't let me see you here again, young man." But Ernest did not care about him now.

He didn't sleep much that night. At last he was an acted author. One of his wild dreams was realised. As he lay still upon his bed that night and listened to St. Clement's chiming two, three, four, he repeated to himself the whole of his four acts from memory, punctuating them with plaudits. He thought of the fair face of Miss Vavasour, illustrating in the flesh the character which he had drawn in the imagination. He listened to her sweet voice, setting the words which he had written to its music. And he mourned the cutting out of his third act, as no one but an

author mourns the mutilation of his work by editors and publishers and managers.

You may be sure that he was up betimes, and that his first act was to seize the newspaper. Yes, there it was. "Important Notice.—In active preparation, and will shortly be produced, with new scenery, costumes, and effects, an entirely new and original comedy in three acts, written by—Mr. Thomson Tinker."

It was too true. Mr. Tinker, having heard that Mrs. Clarke had got hold of a new man, had knocked off at express speed a comedy which he was writing for another house, and taken it in to Mrs. Clarke five minutes after Ernest left her. It was accepted on the spot without being read, and Ernest's scenery was used for it. By the first post came

back Ernest's manuscript, with this laconic note :—

“DEAR SIR,—Herewith MS. No further use for it. Made other arrangements.

“ In haste, yours truly,

“CHARLOTTE CLARKE.”

CHAPTER III.

WILD OATS.

“One sinner destroyeth much good.”—*Ecclesiastes*.

THE black fit was again on Mr. Grey. He has not had one for twelve months—which is an unusually long interval of immunity. For all those months he has been labouring cheerfully both at his business and at public work ; and dealing out his heartiness and hospitality with lavish hand. The glasses have been tinkling and the kettle hissing bravely at his house. But now the fit has come again, with an intensity proportioned to its length of absence.

Again, he is sitting lonely in his room ; but the hearth is not now cold. For it is winter time. A dull, red fire is smouldering in the grate ; and a dull, red pain is smouldering in his heart. But he has now been sitting all alone for days, and is beginning to recover from the fit. Again, the cheery face of Mr. Bonamy is peeping round the door ; and he comes in and takes his seat once more beside his friend, whilst Harry sits downstairs with Edith. He did more good to Mr. Grey than ever anybody knew. Both kindness and unkindness do more good and harm than ever anybody knows.

“Come, come,” cried Mr. Bonamy, “we don’t look quite so bad to-day. The weather’s clearing up.”

“And time it did,” said Mr. Grey. “You don’t know what I suffer, Bonamy.”

"I don't think anybody knows what any of us suffer, Grey," replied the good old friend; in what for him was rather a lugubrious tone.

"Why, surely you don't suffer anything?"

"I have my troubles, like most people; though I try to make the best of them; and many people try to make the worst."

"Are you in trouble, Bonamy?"

"I am in trouble."

This did Mr. Grey more good than anything. Not even Mr. Bonamy's bright genial face and jovial voice could have roused up his friend so much as the assurance that he was in trouble. For Mr. Grey forgot his own, invariably, when he heard of other people's.

"Why, what's the matter?" he asked, almost cheerily.

"Not very much," replied poor Mr. Bonamy; in a tone of voice which meant, it won't seem much to others but it's everything to me.

It was quite curious how the two at once changed places; and it seemed to be Mr. Grey, the good Samaritan, who was consoling Mr. Bonamy, the sufferer.

"It's only Harry," added Mr. Bonamy. It was "only" Harry!

"What's he been doing?"

"Oh, he's very wild. He has been getting into debt, all up and down. I hear all sorts of tales about him."

"Well, you know, he's young. He's lots of time to mend in," pleaded Mr. Grey—"and you don't mind the money."

"I shouldn't mind the money, if it was well spent. But I'm afraid it's not," sighed Mr. Bonamy. "Do you remember that

young woman who was connected with him in that business at the Star?"

"Yes, certainly," said Mr. Grey, who always did remember a good-looking girl.

"I hear he spends a good deal of it over her."

"Well, Bonamy, you know, young men will like young women; and young women will like being liked by young men. That is human nature. I don't think there's anything so very bad in that."

"But I'm afraid it's worse than that."

"Humph," grunted Mr. Grey.

"That's bad, you know," said Mr. Bonamy. And when Mr. Bonamy said a thing was bad, it *was* bad.

Mr. Grey said nothing. He couldn't say it was good; and he felt it wouldn't much cheer Mr. Bonamy, to be agreed with on a point like that.

"And now, I hear, he's got hold of another girl."

"Indeed?"

"An actress, this time."

"What, in Cornfield?"

"Yes, she came here, to the theatre, a little while ago. But then, you don't go to the theatre."

"No," said Mr. Grey, with sudden energy.

"And then, you see, the worst of it is, I can't pitch into him."

"Why not?"

"Why, Grey, because I know too well from where the wildness comes. It isn't from his mother."

"That is rather awkward."

"I've been young myself, and I've been foolish. I've been worse than foolish, Grey, if everybody got their dues. I thought

that I had done with all my sins, though. I didn't bargain for their reappearing in my Harry."

"Better send the lad away for a short time," suggested Mr. Grey, by way of turning back the conversation. For self-reproach is not a pleasant thing to listen to. "Give him a good talking to, and pack him off."

"But I can't give him a good talking to. As soon as ever I see him standing up in front of me, with his blue eyes and curly hair—he *is* a bonny lad!" burst out the father into a parenthesis.

"No doubt of that," said Mr. Grey.

And then the conversation turned upon his better qualities, and cheered up both of them. And so the friends sat talking.

Mr. Grey had been brought up in an intensely dark religious creed; and though

his genial nature threw it off in ordinary life, he still retained it nominally—as so many men profess a creed they have outgrown, and think they do no harm ; and in these gloomy fits, the force of old association would keep bringing haunting doubts and terrors back into his mind : and they were no small portion of his sufferings. Before the sunshine of a kindly presence, these dark clouds rolled off. If man could be so good, would God be less so ? And before he left the bedroom, Mr. Bonamy had almost cured the fit.

Mr. Bonamy's misgivings were well founded. Master Harry had been “going the pace,” as it is called, at I don't know how many miles an hour : scattering abroad—like many another genial young man, with curly hair and laughing eyes and the

best heart in the world—those seeds of evil which bear fruit to all eternity.

The actress Mr. Bonamy had mentioned was a tall, fair girl, who lived alone in dingy lodgings in Cornfield. She was engaged upon the company which was performing at the little theatre there. Her name was Nelly O'Neill.

Harry, who was often at the theatre, had been much struck with her upon her first appearance : for, although she was not an experienced or very clever actress, she was marvellously beautiful. He commenced his operations on the spot, and took up his position at the extreme end of the circle, where the curly hair and laughing eyes could not fail to attract the girl's attention. Harry's operations had not met, however, with the usual success. Though the girl did see him, she would not appear to do so ;

for she was not one of those actresses who gaze about the boxes. Nor was he one of those vulgar pursuers of actresses who do not scruple to go round to the stage-door, and there renew their blandishments. So, for a short time, matters rested as they were.

But women are quick to recognise admiration ; and Nelly O'Neill had a very shrewd suspicion why it was those laughing eyes were to be seen so often at the corner of the circle. Young men do not go to see the same piece six nights together for the sake of art. And I believe she was a little gratified by the attention ; and was not altogether sorry that an opportunity presented itself of making the acquaintance of her admirer.

She had a part-share in a benefit, one night ; and in accordance with a vicious custom far too prevalent, the tickets were

announced to be obtainable at the private residences of the *bénéficiaires*. We may be sure that Harry Bonamy was one of the first persons to present himself at Nelly's residence : and the acquaintance thus begun had ripened rapidly : till Harry had become a frequent caller at the dingy lodgings.

Small wonder that poor, friendless Nelly O'Neill was glad to have those dingy lodgings lighted up by those blue eyes of Harry's ; and small blame to her. But it was an indulgence full of danger to her happiness, as time will show. Alas, the very things which seem to constitute our happiness are often its destruction. A beautiful girl in a dingy lodging ! and what wrinkled beldames in barouches in the park ! It is an incongruity which often strikes the girl.

While Mr. Grey and Mr. Bonamy were talking in the bedroom, Edith was entertaining Harry in the parlour—or rather, Harry was entertaining Edith. No one else was there. Both Mrs. Grey and Hester were away upon a visit. And I am afraid, the entertainment was not quite so orderly and proper as Miss Backboard would approve. The blue eyes and the grey were having a nice game together.

“Oh, yes, it’s all very well,” said Edith, presently. “You can make yourself agreeable enough : but I know, in your heart, you’re wishing I was Miss O’Neill.” For Edith heard a good deal of her Harry’s goings-on, from one kind friend and another; and I think, was rather proud of them than shocked. It is the way with girls.

Of Miss O’Neill she was a trifle jealous :

for though Mr. Grey, with one of his few freaks, would never take her to the theatre, she had once or twice seen Nelly in the street: and the fair face which she saw between a black chip hat and red plaid shawl, was well calculated to inspire that feeling. But she knew that she held Harry in her toils; and every conquest Harry made elsewhere appeared to add a lustre to her own.

"She is a pretty girl," cried Harry, with enthusiasm.

"Indeed," observed Miss Grey. And don't we all know the "indeed" of jealousy?

"She's rather like you," added the adroit youth.

"I don't think so at all," said Edith: for likenesses are one of those things upon which people always disagree.

"Don't you think you're as good-looking?"

"I am not a judge of female beauty," answered Edith, with a toss of the fair head; which seemed to indicate that although not a judge, she had her own ideas none the less, and did not think that the comparison was to her detriment.

"I'm quite of your opinion," observed Harry.

"That I'm not a judge?"

"That you have the advantage."

"I didn't say so."

"But you thought so."

This being undeniable, Edith changed the conversation.

"You see too much of Miss O'Neill," she remarked.

"Not half enough," said Harry.

"If I were your wife"—began Miss Grey;

and then stopped short, and was suffused with beautiful confusion.

It was a bold stroke ; but young ladies are bold, in a modest way : and it was certainly high time that Harry should propose.

“ Why not be ? ” answered that young gentleman.

“ Harry ! ” exclaimed Edith, with as much astonishment as if the idea was a perfectly new one, and not one of which she had been thinking, night and day, for weeks.

“ Yes, my wife. I know I love you ; and I think you love me.”

“ But papa ! ”

“ Oh, I can square papa, if you will give me the authority.”

I need hardly say that the necessary authority was given ; and the usual cere-

monies appropriate to the occasion gone through. But on these I drop a veil.

In the engagement of these two young persons, we see love — the sort of love which will get married, and will go through life successfully, without a ruffle or a break : the sort of love which is agreeable to society—which is blessed by holy mother Church—pure love : as distinguished from that gross and guilty passion which inspires persons of the stamp of Mrs. Vane. It will run smooth, this love ; for it is not true love.

When the two papas came down—for Mr. Bonamy had actually succeeded in inducing Mr. Grey to leave his bedroom—the interesting intelligence was communicated to them.

“ Whew ! ” whistled Mr. Bonamy, with a delighted face. He thought he saw an end

to all his troubles, and that Harry would now "settle down."

But Mr. Grey's face wore a rather serious air. He looked from Harry to his daughter, who had nestled on his arm, and whose grey eyes were looking up to his: and something very like a tear came glistening in his own. Surely, this sort of love is not going to run roughly? No, not very.

"Harry," said Mr. Grey, "of course I've seen that this was coming." And the thing which was something like a tear became quite unmistakable: for Mr. Grey was thinking of Ernest. "And I don't say I object. But it must not be just yet. You know that I am not the one to be too hard upon young men: but before I trust you with my daughter, you must give me some security that you are going to lead a steady life."

"I don't know that I have done anything I am ashamed of, Mr. Grey," said Harry, in his frankest manner.

"Lizzie Simmons," whispered Mr. Bonamy; and Harry hung his head.

"Suppose you go away—for three months, say—and leave all your associates here. Live soberly for that time, and then come again to me for my consent."

"You'll let us write to one another, though, papa?" said Edith.

"Yes," replied her father. "You may write to one another. It may help Harry."

There was no demurring to this proposition. For all his frankness Harry Bonamy was conscious of some rather serious delinquencies; and to tell the truth, was not altogether reluctant to leave Cornfield for a while. And so it was arranged that he should go to London for three months. A

rather strange selection of locality : but Mr. Bonamy could find him some employment there ; and as Mr. Grey said, " if he couldn't stand temptation, there must be an end of it."

Now here we have a strange phenomenon. We find a tender, generous father like Mr. Grey, about to trust his daughter to a man who is notorious for committing what religion and society denounce as deadly sins. It is done every day ; and is a striking proof of how men's minds are larger than their creeds ; and see that certain things which they profess to hold in horror must exist. This sort of tolerance is the homage which morality pays nature ; and this inconsistency between men's practice and professions shows that there is something rotten in our social laws.

The Bonamys went off as usual arm in

arm, and Edith hugged her father. She hugged him all the more that he had been a little stern: for women dearly love severity. They fawn like dogs upon the hand which smites them. For they feel, whatever they may say, their radical inferiority to man; and love to have a master even though he be a tyrant. The man who treats them with oppression and brutality they will forgive and even defend; whilst him who uses them with justice, clemency, and kindness, they will cast from them like a dirty glove.

CHAPTER IV.

NELLY O'NEILL.

"Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labour which I took under the sun."

Ecclesiastes.

YES, very dingy lodgings. The door is like those doors upon the stage—the lower panels bigger than the higher. The bedroom paper is all over cracks. The moulding round the pier-glass is half broken off. The two globes on the gas-brackets are of different patterns. The pictures on the walls are pious and mouldy. The Day of Judgment in a whitey-black, and the

Plains of Heaven in a blacky-white. The carpet is quite threadbare, and the sofa-springs are broken.

Like a sun illuminating all this dinginess and shining glory even on the Plains of Heaven, is one of those fair faces crowned with golden hair which visit earth perhaps once a generation ; as though nature wished to show that, notwithstanding the abominable ugliness with which she swamps the world, her hand has not forgot its cunning ; and can bring to birth faces more fair than painters can design, and forms more comely than the sculptor can conceive. A sort of face that pulls you right up when you meet it in the street, and which it is not rude to gaze at.

This is Nelly. She is sitting on the sofa with the broken springs, with a book of the forthcoming pantomime upon her

lap—for it is the day before Christmas Day, and the pantomime is to be produced to-night, and she is Fairy Queen. And, by her side is sitting Harry Bonamy. There is a troubled look on Nelly's face, and her slim hands are playing with the pantomime-book, nervously.

“You don't really mean—that you are going away?”

“I do indeed,” said Harry. “After new year's day they're going to pack me off.”

“But not for long?”

“For some months.”

“Months!” exclaimed the girl. “I may be gone by you come back.”

“I hope not,” remarked Harry: which was not exactly true. He was beginning to believe it would be best for both of them that their acquaintance should be put an end to.

"Where is it you're going?"

"London."

"And what for?"

This was a puzzler: but the frank and candid manner carried conviction with it, when he said, "I'm going on business." For how can curly hair and blue eyes tell a lie?

"Oh, how I wish that I was going to London!" sighed the girl.

Harry pulled his moustache, and began to feel very uncomfortable. "Why will girls fall in love with me?" was his reflection.

"You are the only friend I have—the only one who has been kind to me—the only one I love."

Poor Nelly! she is another of those wicked and immoral persons who are influenced by base and sensual passions, and

who give expression to them in the most unmaidenly and immodest manner. This love will not run smooth.

The fair face is as white as snow, and the wide open eyes gaze on him wistfully. It was getting awkward.

"Oh, we shall meet again, Nell; we shall meet again. Three months is only three months after all."

"Three months?"

"Or four," said Harry, quickly. "I don't know exactly."

"You won't forget me?"

"How could I forget you?"

"And you'll write to me?"

It had got awkward—very awkward. But Harry was equal to it.

"Write to you? of course I shall," he answered; thinking to himself, "of course I shan't."

"And you will let me write to you?"

"Oh, certainly. Yes, you *must* write to me."

"What will be your address?"

"I really don't know. When I do, I'll send it you."

"This will be mine, you know. And when I leave here, I shall leave word where I'm going to."

"Oh, yes. It will be all right. Don't be down-hearted."

"Oh, Harry," sobbed the girl, "I have been so happy these few weeks. And I was never happy in my life before. You won't leave me, will you? You'll come back to me?"

Harry was not destined to reap many of the wild oats he had sown—the sowers seldom are—but he was reaping the first little harvest now.

"Of course I shall, Nell dear. There's nothing to be melancholy over. Isn't it time for the rehearsal?"

"Yes," said Nelly, "it's past time. But I've forgotten all my part now."

"Then, my dear, the greater need for you to be at the rehearsal."

"You'll come with me?"

"Yes," said Harry. But it cost an effort : for they would have to pass the Greys upon the way, and Edith might be at the window. But there was no help for it. It was impossible for Harry to resist that pleading face. So Nelly went into an adjoining room and fetched the black chip hat and red plaid shawl, and Harry put them on her ; and she held her face up to be kissed and Harry kissed her, and they sallied forth together.

There was to be a dinner-party at Mr.

Grey's—not a magnificent affair, but just one of those homely comfortable dinners where you have the choicest of wines and every luxury of the season. The Bonamys were to be there, of course; and so was Ernest, who had come down to spend Christmas with his mother. It was to be an early dinner, so that they might have a nice long evening; but the company had not yet come. Edith was still busy with her toilet, but Hester was downstairs with Mr. Grey, who, in the best of Christmas humours, stood beside her at the window, waiting for his friends. Mrs. Grey reclined as usual upon the sofa, having got a bran-new headache specially for the occasion.

For a long time Mr. Grey and Hester stood together, looking at the passers-by, who plodded along bravely through the frost and

snow. A blazing fire was crackling on the hearth, reflected by the glasses on the table. Mr. Grey's attention was at last attracted by a red plaid shawl, the ends of which were fluttering in the wind; and as the shawl came nearer he devoted his attention to the face above it.

"By Jove, Hester, isn't that a pretty girl?" exclaimed the old boy, quite enthusiastically.

"You're always looking out for pretty girls," complained Mrs. Grey, from the sofa. "A man of your age! It's ridiculous."

"Well, my dear," answered Mr. Grey, gallantly, "if I hadn't been I never should have noticed you." For it was Christmas time.

"Why, that is Miss O'Neill," cried Hester, as the shawl approached the window: for all the ladies in Cornfield

knew Miss O'Neill by sight, and didn't care how soon she left the town.

"And who's that with her?" added Mr. Grey. "If it's not that young rascal, Harry!"

"It's well Edith isn't here," said Hester.

Harry never lifted his eyes to the window as he passed it; but in his heart wished Nelly wouldn't look up at him so affectionately at that moment.

As they passed, a deeper interest than simple admiration seemed to come into the face of Mr. Grey.

"Who did you say it was?" he asked his daughter.

"Miss O'Neill, the actress," replied Hester.

"Is that Miss O'Neill?" And Mr. Grey looked after her. "Well, she's a very pretty girl," he said abruptly, and walked whistling to the fire.

But it was no use. The tune wouldn't come. A solemn look came over his frank face; and the same something that was rather like a tear was glistening in his eyes.

"Papa, what's the matter?" inquired Hester, for the daughters noticed every change that came over their father's face.

"Oh, nothing," answered Mr. Grey. "But Miss O'Neill reminded me of something." Then, throwing the depression off by force, he laid his hands upon some flowers which were arranged upon the table.

"You mustn't touch those flowers," remonstrated his wife. "They're for the dinner-party."

"Never mind the dinner-party. Hester, make me a bouquet."

In half a minute Hester had completely

ruined the centre-dish ; and in a minute or two more had organised a beautiful bouquet—inside of which, when nobody was looking, Mr. Grey deposited a ten-pound note.

“ Now then a basket.”

And the basket was at once forthcoming ; and to Mrs. Grey's disgust, the choicest fruit upon the table was put into it.

“ And now a slip of paper.”

Mr. Grey scribbled on it—“ With an old man's blessing ”—and Hester tied it to the basket.

“ Who knows Miss O'Neill's address ?”

“ You're never going to send those things to that girl, just because she passed the window ?” grumbled Mrs. Grey. But nobody took any notice of her observation.

No one seemed to know what Miss O'Neill's address was, not even Edith who had just come down ; and so the

basket was directed to the theatre, and a servant packed off with it there and then.

“Girls,” exclaimed Mr. Grey — upon whom the face of Miss O'Neill had made a strange impression—“what do you say to us all going to the pantomime to-night?”

The girls were staggered; Mrs. Grey was staggered. But the girls were delighted, and Mrs. Grey was not. But her remonstrances were quite unheeded, and it was arranged that they should go.

“But the dinner-party,” objected Mrs. Grey.

“We'll take the dinner-party with us,” said her husband.

He had never offered to take his daughters to the theatre before, and now he was about to take a dinner-party. Mr. Grey had his peculiarities. But this was one which gave his daughters perfect satisfaction, and which

all the dinner-party, when they came, fell in with. Mr. Bonamy was in high spirits over it, and Ernest was quite willing—for he had just heard of Edith's provisional engagement, and was in no mood for conversation.

These dead and buried loves have a capacity of resurrection in them which is very disagreeable. Their ghosts always seem to walk the earth ; and have a nasty knack of coming plump upon us round a corner.

And Edith recalled Rosamond, and his heart ached ; as hearts will ache, when they are sitting by a comfortable fire surrounded by their friends, possessing everything they want—but one.

There may be one or two amongst my readers who know what it is to feel that somebody they love is somewhere in the world—they know not where—living a life

apart from them, unknown to them ; and growing day by day more alienated and estranged from them. One is not able to go out into the street or any public place without a mad, despairing scrutiny of every form one sees ; and if there is a single face one fails to catch, a horrible remorse comes over one lest that should have been she. There is no rest by night or day.

Harry turned up rather late. He was not sure whether he had been observed or not, although he had a mysterious consciousness that somebody was at the window when he passed it. Any lingering hope that he might be mistaken, which he may have cherished, was dispelled upon his entrance ; when a general chorus of, " We saw you," broke from the assembled company.

" Eh ? what ?" said Harry, with an ill-assumed amazement.

“A black chip hat,” said Mr. Bonamy.

“And a red plaid shawl,” said Mr. Grey.

Edith said nothing, but looked rather black. A week ago she would have laughed like all the rest ; but since then she had obtained a sort of provisional proprietorship in Harry, and she thought she'd try a little rattle of the chains.

It was a mistake, Miss Edith. That rattling of the chains never does any good, and often does a great deal of harm. If a lover is inconstant, there is only one judicious course—to let him be inconstant and endure it, or have done with him, as choice dictates.

Harry, seeing that concealment was of no use, joined the general laugh ; and said, “Well, anyhow, I'm not the only person who admires her. There are old fools just as well as young fools.”

"That there are," said Mrs. Grey, with some asperity.

"Before I left the theatre," continued Harry, "there came a basket with all sorts of fruit and flowers in it, as a present to her from an old man."

"Some old beau of seventy, I shouldn't wonder," remarked Mr. Grey, with a wink at Hester, "who admires her from the boxes."

"Some old fool, no doubt," assented Harry, with an emphasis which sent Miss Grey into a fit of laughter.

Harry might have guessed who sent the basket, if he'd only thought: for there are not too many such old fools in this world. But brains were not Harry's strong point. Ernest knew all about it; and Mr. Bonamy began to smell a rat.

"Did she like it?" inquired Mr. Grey.

"Of course she liked it; and the ballet had a fine feast, I can tell you; but he was an old fool too that sent it," went on the unconscious youth.

"Why, Harry?" asked his father, with a glance at Mr. Grey.

"He'd positively put a ten-pound note in it."

"What!" screamed out Mrs. Grey, in quite a vigorous tone; and Mr. Grey was fain to hide his head behind a newspaper.

Everybody else laughed out; and even Harry saw how matters stood, and coloured with confusion.

"I might have known it!" he exclaimed, impatiently.

"Well, Harry, never mind," said Mr. Grey. "I dare say it will come in useful."

“It will, sir—very useful,” he replied. “She only gets a pound a week, and has no friends.”

“Poor thing!” said Mr. Grey; and “Poor thing!” echoed the Miss Greys, and Mr. Bonamy; but the nerves of Mrs. Grey were shattered for the day.

“Papa has taken a great fancy to her, Harry,” explained Edith. “And he’s positively going to take us to the pantomime to-night. Won’t that be nice?”

But Master Harry did not seem to take to the idea with his usual good humour. In truth, his situation was becoming the reverse of pleasant. A man between two stools is nothing to a man between two women. He would have to sit beside Edith, of course; and he knew how sharp was that sweet pair of eyes upon the stage which never seemed to look into the boxes.

He almost wished the week was over and that he could run away to London ; but he managed to say, "Yes, that will be jolly."

Here dinner was announced ; and Mr. Bonamy took Mrs. Grey, and Mr. Grey took Mrs. Tempest. Harry, of course, went with Edith ; and Ernest followed them with Hester.

It was a merry dinner-party. The champagne corks popped and flew, and the wine creamed in the glasses. Mr. Grey beamed over the whole table. Mr. Bonamy cracked a succession of the very worst of jokes, and laughed at them so heartily that everybody else laughed too. Mrs. Tempest was placidly happy, and even Mrs. Grey dispensed her favours graciously. Ernest was the only shadow at the feast : and Edith, who sat opposite, first looked at his blank

visage and then looked at Harry's laughing face, and congratulated herself a hundred times on the wisdom of her choice.

The dinner over, a small omnibus conveyed the party to the theatre. Some surprise and perhaps a little consternation was occasioned by Mrs. Grey announcing her recovery from the headache and her intention of joining the party. But this little contretemps was soon got over, and they bowled off through the slush and snow.

The little theatre was crammed. It was as much as they could do to get as many seats as they required, and Mrs. Grey's lamentations over the inconvenience of her position were loud and incessant. However, having tried the respective seats of every one of the party without any satisfaction, she ultimately settled down in her

original position, and subsided into silent discontent.

It was a genuine old theatre, with an honest green curtain and a smell of orange-peel. To-night it looked quite brilliant, when the lights were turned on and the fiddles tuned up in the orchestra.

It was a genuine old pantomime too, full of rollicking fun and tomfoolery, and not a wearisome succession of glaring scenes and gorgeous pageants. What money could be spared for scenery was devoted to the fairy scenes, and Nelly's dress was probably the costliest of all. It opened in the good old way, in a dark cavern which the evil spirits haunted, with lots of thunder and lightning and no end of demons. Then there was a comic scene, and then the Fairies' Grotto.

The ladies of the ballet, who appeared

as the subsidiary fairies, dressed in the accustomed gauzy dresses, danced about in the accustomed style ; and when the dance was ended, grouped themselves together in the centre of the stage to receive their queen. She did not walk on from the wings in the disgustingly prosaic way in which our modern fairy queens appear, but came down from the clouds in good old-fashioned style. A sort of gauze was lowered from the flies and gradually disappeared, revealing fleecy clouds, which by-and-by unrolled—disclosing, mounted upon one of them, a fairy being, in a flood of limelight, dressed in cloth of gold.

Who would have recognised, in this ethereal dazzling creature, the slim girl in the black chip hat and red plaid shawl, whom Mr. Grey saw plodding through the snow ? But it was she. No doubt about

it. Her reception was tremendous: for her beauty made her very popular. And perched upon her tall fairy's wand, Mr. Grey recognised the flowers which he had sent her.

"She is pretty," said the old boy, vigorously clapping.

"That she is!" assented Mr. Bonamy, augmenting the applause.

"Oh, she is beautiful!" cried Hester, who was looking at her through an opera-glass. "Don't you think so, Mr. Tempest?"

Ernest did, but in a listless sort of way, as if he didn't mean to go admiring any more young ladies. But as soon as the applause died down and Nelly's first words echoed through the house, his manner changed. He almost started from his seat, seized Hester's opera-glass rudely,

and gazed long and almost fiercely at the glittering girl—then dropped the glass and sat as still as stone.

Yes, reader, you are quite right. It was Rosamond.

END OF VOL. II.



